

THE
W O R K S
O F
V O L T A I R E.

VOL. XIV.

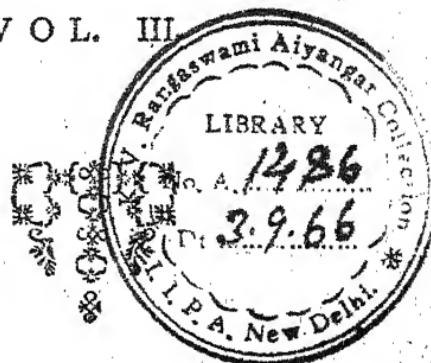
Being VOL. III. of his

D R A M A T I C W O R K S.

THE
DRAMATIC WORKS
OF
Mr. DE VOLTAIRE.

Translated by the Rev. Mr. FRANCKLIN.

VOL. III.



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M.DCC.LXII.

This VOLUME contains

A LETTER to her Most Serene Highness the DUCHESS of MAINE.

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PREFACE to the PRODIGAL, a Comedy.

The PRODIGAL. A Comedy.

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A LETTER to the Marquis SCIPIO MAFFEI, Author of the *Italian MEROPE*, and many other celebrated Performances.

A LETTER from Mr. de la LINDELLE to Mr. de VOLTAIRE.

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A

L E T T E R

TO

Her Most Serene HIGHNESS

THE

D U T C H E S S O F M A I N E.

MADAM,

Y O U have seen that noble age, which is at once the model and the reproach of the present, and will be so of future generations, and have yourself made a part of its glory, by your taste and by your example: those illustrious times, when your ancestors, the *Condés*, crowned with laurels, cultivated the polite arts; when a *Boffet* immortalised heroes, and instructed kings; when a *Fenelon*, the second of mankind in eloquence, and the first in the art of making virtue amiable, taught justice and humanity

V O L . III.

B

in

In the most charming manner; when Racine and Billeau presided over the *Belles-Lettres*, Lully over music, and le Brun over painting; all these arts, Madam, met together in your palace: there I had first the happiness, a circumstance which I shall never forget, of hearing, though I was then but a child, that excellent scholar, whose profound learning never obscured the brightness of his genius, cultivating the fine understanding of the *Duke of Bourgogne*, the *Duke of Maine*, and yourself: that happy labour, in which he was so powerfully assisted by nature. Sometimes he would take up a *Sophocles* or *Euripides* before you, and translate off hand one of their tragedies. The admiration and enthusiasm that possessed his soul, on reading those noble performances, inspired him with expressions that answered the manly and harmonious energy of the *Greek*, as nearly as it was possible to reach it in the prose of a language just emerging from barbarism, and which, polished as it now is by so many fine authors, is still, notwithstanding, very deficient in point of force, copiousness, and precision. It is impossible to convey through any modern language, all the power of *Greek* expressions; they describe, with one stroke, what costs us a whole sentence. A single word was sufficient for them to express

pref a mountain covered over with trees, bending beneath the weight of their leaves ; or, a god throwing his darts at a vast distance ; or, the tops of rocks struck with repeated thunderbolts. That language had not only the advantage of filling the imagination with a word, but every word, we know, had its peculiar melody, which charmed the ear at the same time that it display'd the finest pictures to the mind ; and all *our* translations for this reason from the Greek poets are weak, dry, and poor : it is imitating palaces of porphyry with bricks and pebbles. *Mr. de Malezieu* notwithstanding, by the efforts of a sudden enthusiasm, and a vehement forcible manner of reciting, seem'd to make up for the poverty of our language, and infuse into his declamation the very soul and spirit of the great Athenians. Permit me, Madam, to give you his thoughts with regard to this inventive, ingenious, and sensible people, a people from whom the Romans, their conquerors, learned every thing, and who, a long time after the fall of both their empires, had yet the power to raise modern Europe from ignorance and barbarism.

He knew more of Athens than many of our travellers in these days do of Rome, after they have seen it over and over. That vast quantity of statues,

by the greatest masters ; those pillars which adorned the public market-places ; those monuments of taste and grandeur ; that superb and immense theatre, built in the finest situation, between the town and the citadel, where the works of *Sophocles* and *Euripides* were heard by *Pericles* and *Socrates* ; and the youth of Athens attended, not standing up, or in perpetual riot and confusion, as they do with us : in a word, every thing which the Athenians had done in every art and every branch of knowledge, was ever present to the mind of Mr. *de Malezieu*. He was far from falling in with the opinions of those ridiculously rigid critics, and false politicians, who blame the Athenians for having been too sumptuous in their public entertainments, and do not know that this very magnificence greatly enriched Athens, by attracting crouds of foreigners, who came from all parts to admire, and to receive lessons from them on eloquence and virtue.

This extensive and almost universal genius was engaged by you, Madam, to translate the *Iphigenia in Tauris* of *Euripides* ; a task which he executed with equal elegance, strength, and fidelity. It was represented at an entertainment which he had the honour to present to your Highness, an entertainment worthy

worthy of him who gave, and of her who received it. You, I remember, Madam, play'd the part of *Iphi-genia*; for I was present at the representation; and as at that time I had no acquaintance with the French stage, it never enter'd into my head that gallantry cou'd ever have been mingled with so tragical a subject. I gave myself up to the manners and customs of Greece, perhaps the more easily, because I was then acquainted with no other. I admired the *antique* in all its noble simplicity: it was this which first suggested to me the idea of writing my tragedy of *Oedipus*, without ever having read *Corneille's*. I begun, as an essay of my abilities, by translating that famous scene from *Sophocles*, of the double confidence of *Jocasta* and *Oedipus*. I read it to some of my friends, who frequented the theatre, and to two or three actors: they assur'd me it wou'd never succeed on the French stage, and advis'd me to read *Corneille*, who had carefully avoided that part of the plot, and all agreed, that if I did not follow his example, by putting in a love intrigue, the players wou'd never undertake it. I then read the *Oedipus* of *Corneille*, which, though it was not rank'd with *Cinna* and *Polyeuete*, had, notwithstanding, met with some applause. I must confess, their opinions ran directly counter to mine, from the beginning of this affair to the

end ; but I was forc'd to submit to example, and the evil power of fashion. In the mid'st of all the terror of this master-piece of antiquity, I brought in, not abso-
lutely a love intrigue, but the * remembrance of an ex-
tinguish'd passion, which appear'd to the last degree
absurd ; but I will not repeat here what I have already
said on this subject.

Your highness may remember, I had the honour of reading my *Oedipus* to you ; the scene from *Sophocles* was not condemn'd at that tribunal ; for both yourself, the *Cardinal de Polignac*, Mr de *Malouet*, and your whole court, unanimously condemn'd me, and with great reason, for having so much as mention'd the word love in a work which *Sophocles* finish'd so completely, and so successfully, without that unhappy foreign ornament ; and yet the very fault which you blamed me for, was the only thing that recommended my performance to the stage. The players were, with the greatest difficulty, prevail'd on to perform my *Oedipus*, which they imagin'd cou'd never succeed : the public, however, were intirely of your opinion ; every

* Voltaire here alludes to the part of *Philoctetes* in his *Oedipus*. See the play, and the preface to it, in the first Vol. of the Dramatic works.

part of it that was written in the taste of *Sophocles* was generally applauded, and the love scenes condemn'd by the most judicious critics : to say the truth, Madam, whilst parricide and incest are destroying a family, and a plague laying the whole country waste, is it a season for love and gallantry ? There cannot, perhaps, be two more striking proofs of theatrical absurdity, and the power of habit, than *Cornelie*, on one side, making *Theseus* cry out,

* Quelque ravage affreux qu'etaie ici la peste,
L'absence aux vrais amans est encor plus funeste.

And on the other, myself, sixty years after him, making old *Jocasta* talk of her old love ; and all this only in compliance with a taste the most false and ridiculous that ever corrupted literature.

That a *Phædra*, whose character is, perhaps, the most truly theatrical that ever was exhibited, and almost the only person whom antiquity hath represented in love, that she shou'd express all the power and fury of

* The literal translation of which is " whatever dreadful havoc the plague may make here, absence to those who truly love is much more dreadful." There is a great deal of such nonsense in Dryden's and some other of our tragedies, but it wou'd not go down in the present age.

that fatal passion : that a *Roxana*, confin'd within the walls of an idle seraglio, shou'd abandon herself to love and jealousy : that *Ariadne* shou'd complain to heaven and earth of cruelty and inconstancy : that *Orofmanes* shou'd destroy a mistress whom he ador'd : all this is truly tragic : love, either raging, or criminal, or unhappy, or attended with remorse, draws such tears from us as we need not blush to shed ; but there is no medium : love shou'd either command as a tyrant, or not appear at all ; he can never act an under part : but that *Nero* shou'd hide himself behind the tapestry to overhear the conversation of his mistress and his rival : that old *Mithridates* shou'd make use of a comedy trick to discover the secret of a young woman belov'd by his two sons : that *Maximus*, even in *Cinna*, a piece of so much real merit, shou'd act the part of a villain, and discover so important a conspiracy, only because he was weak enough to be in love with a woman whose passion for *Cinna* he must have known, and alledge by way of reason, that

† Love excuses all,
For the true lover knows no friends —

† The Original is,

“ L'amour rend tout permis,
“ Un véritable amant ne connaît point d'amis.”

that

that old *Sertorius* shou'd fall in love with a strange Spanish lady, call'd *Viriate*, and be assassin'd by his rival *Perpenna*; all this, we will be bold enough to assert, is little mean, and puerile: such ridiculous stuff wou'd degrade us infinitely below the Athenians, if our great masters had not made amends for these faults, which are merely national, by those sublime beauties which are intirely the product of their own genius.

It is indeed astonishing to me, that the great tragic poets of Athens shou'd dwell so much on those subjects where nature displays every thing that is great and affecting; an *Electra*, an *Iphigenia*, a *Merope*, an *Alceon*: and that our illustrious moderns, neglecting all these, shou'd scarce treat of any thing but love, which is generally much more proper for comedy than tragedy: sometimes indeed they have endeavour'd to enrich and adorn it by politicks; but that love which is not violent is always cold, and all political intrigues that do not rise to the height and fury of ambition are still more cold and insipid: political reasonings and debates are very agreeable in *Polybius* or *Machiavel*; gallantry is very fit for tales, or comedies; but nothing like this is suitable to the grandeur and pathos of true tragedy.

A taste for gallantry in our tragedies was carry'd to such a ridiculous excess, that a great princess, whose high rank and fine understanding might in some measure excuse her believing that all the world wou'd be of her opinion, imagin'd, that the parting of *Titus* and *Berenice* was an excellent subject for a tragedy: she therefore put it into the hands of * two of our best writers; neither of them had ever produc'd a performance wherein love had not play'd the principal or at least the second part; but one of them had never touch'd the heart, except in those scenes of the *Cid* which he had taken from the Spanish: the other, always tender and elegant, endow'd with every species of eloquence, and above all, master of that enchanting art which draws forth the most delicate sentiments from the least and most unpromising incidents: one therefore made of *Titus* and *Berenice* as contemptible a piece as ever appear'd on the stage; the other found out the secret of interesting the spectator for five acts without any other foundation but these words, *I love you, and I leave you.* It was indeed nothing more than a pastoral,

* The French expression is "deux maîtres de la scène, i. e. "two masters of the scene." Corneille and Racine, the latter of whom Voltaire takes every occasion of preferring to the former, though he frequently censures both with great freedom, and generally with equal justice.

between an emperor, a king, and a queen ; and a pastoral withal infinitely less tragical than the interesting scenes of *Paster Fids*. The success of this, however, persuad'd the public, and the poets, that love, and love alone, was the soul of tragedy.

It was not till long after, when he was further advanc'd in life, that this great poet found out that he was capable of something superior to this : when he was sorry he had enervated the drama by so many declarations of love, and sentiments of jealousy, and coquetry, much worthier, as I have already ventur'd to assert, of Menander, than of Sophocles and Euripides. Then he wrote his master-piece, *Athaliah* ; but though he was undéceiv'd himself, the public was *not* : they cou'd not bring themselves to conceive, that a woman, a child, and a priest, cou'd make an interesting tragedy : a work that approach'd nearer to perfection than any which ever came from the hand of man, remain'd for a long time in contempt, and its illustrious author had to his last hour the mortification of seeing the age he liv'd in, though greatly improv'd, still so corrupted with bad taste, as never to do justice to his noblest performance.

It is certain, if this great man had liv'd, and cultivated those talents which alone made his fortune and his fame,

fame, and which therefore he shou'd not have deserted, he wou'd have restor'd to the theatre its ancient purity, and no more have degraded the great subjects of antiquity with love intrigue. He had begun an *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and there was not a word of gallantry in his whole plan: he wou'd never have made *Agamemnon*, *Orestes*, *Electra*, *Telephus*, or *Ajax*, in love: but having unhappily quitted the stage before he had reform'd it, all those who followed him imitated, and even add'd to his faults, without copying any of his beauties. The morality of *Quinault's* operas was brought into almost every tragic scene: sometimes it is an *Alcibiades* who assures us, that *in those tender moments he has always prov'd by experience, that a mortal may taste of perfect happiness*: sometimes it is an *Amestris* who tells us, that the daughter of a great king burns with a secret flame without *shame, and without fear*: in another, *Agnoris follows the steps of the fair Crisis in every place, the constant adorer of her divine charms*; the fierce *Arminius*, the defender of *Germany*, protests to us, that *he comes to read his fate in the eyes of Ismenia*, and goes to the camp of *Varus*, to see if — *the fair eyes of his Ismenia will shew him their wonted tenderness*. — In *Amasis*, which is only *Merope*, crowded with a heap of romantic episodes, the heroine, who, three days before,

at a country house, had just got sight of a young stranger, and fall'n in love with him, cries out, with a great deal of regard to decency and decorum, — *This is the same stranger, alafs! he bath not conceal'd himself so much as he ought, for my repose : for the few moments when he chanc'd to strike my eyes I saw him and blufb'd, my soul was deeply mov'd at him.* — *In Athenais*, a prince of Persia disguises himself, in order to make his mistress a visit at the court of a Roman emperor : we fancy, in short, that we are reading the romances of Mademoiselle *Scuderi*, who describ'dt he citizens of Paris under the names of the heroes of antiquity.

To confirm and establish this horrid taste amongst us, which renders us so ridiculous in the eyes of all sensible foreigners, it unfortunately happen'd, that Mr. de *Longepierre*, a warm admirer of antiquity, but not sufficiently acquainted with our stage, and who besides was careless in his versification, gave us his *Electra*. We must confess it was written in the taste of the antiquits, no cold ill-placed intrigue disfigur'd this subject full of terror : the piece was simple, and without any episode. This procured for it, and with great reason, the patronage of so many persons of the first consideration, who flatter'd themselves that this valuable simplicity, which constituted the principle merit of the

great

great geniuses of Athens, wou'd be well receiv'd at Paris, were it had been so long neglected. You, Madam, with the late princess of *Conti*, were at the head of those sanguine friends ; but, unhappily, the faults of the French piece were so numerous, in comparison with the beauties which he had borrow'd from the *Greek*, that you yourself acknowledg'd, at the representation, it was a statue of *Praxteles* disfigur'd by a modern artist. You had resolution enough to give up a thing which was not in reality worthy of being supported, well knowing, that favor and protection, thrown away on bad performances, is as prejudical to the advancement of wit and good sense, as the unjust censure of real merit ; but the downfall of *Elettra* was a terrible stroke on the partisans of antiquity. The critics avail'd themselves of the faults of the copy, the better to decry the merit of the original ; and to complete the corruption of our taste, we persuaded ourselves it was impossible to support, without love and romance, those subjects which the Greeks had never debased by such episodes : it was pretended that we might admire the Greek tragedians in the reading, but that it was impossible to imitate them without being condemn'd by our own age and nation : strange contradiction !

tion ! for, surely, if the reading really pleas'd us, how cou'd the representation displease ?

We shou'd not, I acknowledge, endeavour to imitate what is weak and defective in the antients : it is most probable that their faults were very well known to their cotemporaries. I am satisfy'd, Madam, that the wits of Athens condemn'd, as well as you, some of those repetitions, and some declamations with which *Sophocles* has loaded his *Electra*: they must have observ'd that he had not dived deep enough into the human heart. I will moreover fairly confess, that there are beauties peculiar not only to the Greek language, but to the climate, to manners and times, which it wou'd be ridiculous to transplant hither. I have not copy'd exactly therefore the *Electra* of *Sophocles*, much more I knew wou'd be necessary ; but I have taken, as well as I cou'd, all the spirit and substance of it. The feast celebrated by *Ægisthus* and *Clytemnæstra*, which they call'd the feast of *Agamemnon*; the arrival of *Orestes* and *Pylades*; the urn which was suppos'd to contain the ashes of *Orestes*; the ring of *Agamemnon*; the character of *Electra*, and that of *Iphisa*, which is exactly the *Chrysothemis* of *Sophocles*; and above all, the remorse of *Clytemnæstra*; these I have copy'd from the Greek tragedy. When the messenger, who relates the

fictitious

fictitious story of the death of *Orestes*, says to *Clytemnestra*, "I see, Madam, you are deeply affected at his death ;" she replies, "I am a mother, and must therefore be unhappy ; a mother, though injur'd, cannot hate her own offspring :" she even endeavours to justify herself to *Electra*, with regard to the murther of *Agamemnon*, and laments her daughter. *Euripides* has carry'd *Clytemnestra*'s repentance still further. This, Madam, was what gain'd the applause of the most judicious and sensible people upon earth, and was approv'd by all good judges in our own nation. No character, in reality, can be more natural than that of a woman, criminal with regard to her husband, yet soften'd by her children; a woman, whose proud and fiery disposition is still open to pity and compassion, who resumes the fierceness of her character on receiving too severe reproaches, and at last sinks into submission and tears. The seeds of this character were in *Sophocles* and *Euripides*, and I have only unfolded them. Nothing but ignorance, and its natural attendant, presumption, can assert, that the antiquits have nothing worthy of our imitation : there is scarce one real and essential beauty and perfection, for the foundation of which, at least, we are not indebted to them.

I have

I have taken particular care not to depart from that simplicity so strongly recommended by the Greeks, and so difficult to attain, the true mark of genius and invention; and the very essence of all theatrical merit. A foreign character, brought into *Oedipus* or *Electra*, who shou'd play a principal part, and draw aside the attention of the audience, wou'd be a monster in the eyes of all those who have any knowledge of the antients, or of that nature which they have so finely painted. Art and genius consist in finding every thing within the subject, and never going out of it in search of additional ornaments: but how are we to imitate that truly tragic pomp and magnificence which we find in the verses of Sophocles, that natural elegance and purity of diction, without which the piece, how well soever conducted in other respects, must after all be but a poor performance!

I have at least given my countrymen some idea of a tragedy without love, without confidants, and without episodes: the few partisans of good taste acknowledge themselves oblig'd to me for it, tho' the rest of the world withhold their approbation for a time, but will come in at last, when the rage of party is over, the injustice of persecution at an end, and the clouds of ignorance dissipated. You, Madam, must preserve amongst us those glittering sparks of light which the antients have transmitted

transmitted to us; we owe every thing to them: not an art was born amongst us; every thing was transplanted: but the earth that bears these foreign fruits is worn out, and our antient barbarism, by the help of false taste, wou'd break out again in spite of all our culture and improvement: and the disciples of Athens and Rome become Goths and Vandals, corrupted with the manners of the Sibarites, without the kind favor and protection of persons of your rank. When nature hath given them either genius, or the love of genius, they encourage this nation, which is better able to imitate than to invent; and which always looks up towards the great for those instructions and examples which it perpetually stands in need of. All that I wish for, Madam, is, that some genius may be found to finish what I have but just sketch'd out; to free the stage from that effeminacy and affectation which it is now sunk into; to render it respectable to the gravest characters; worthy of the few great master pieces which we already have amongst us; worthy, in short, the approbation of a mind like yours, and all those who may hereafter endeavor to resemble you.



ORESTES.

A

TRAGEDY.

Represented in 1750.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ORESTES, Son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra.

ELECTRA, } Sisters of Orestes

IPHISA,

CLYTEMNESTRA, Wife of Ægisthus.

PYLADES, Friend of Orestes.

PAMMENES, an old Man, attach'd to the Family of Agamemnon.

DIMAS, an Officer of the Guards.

ATTENDANTS.

SCENE, the sea-shore, a wood, a temple, a palace and a tomb, on one side: on the other, Argos at a distance.

O R E S T E S .

O R E S T E S.

A

T R A G E D Y.

A C T I. S C E N E I.

IPHISA, PAMMENES.

IPHISA.

Say'ſt thou, Pammenes ? ſhall theſe hated walls,
 Where I fo long have dragg'd a life of woe,
 Afford at leaſt the melancholy comfort
 Of mingling ſorrows with my dear Electra ?
 And will Ægithus bring her to the tomb
 Of Agamemnon, bring his daughter here,
 To be a witness of the horrid pomp,
 The ſad ſolemnity, which on this day
 Annual returns, to celebrate their crimes,
 And make their guilt immortal ?

PAMMENES.

O Iphisa,

Thou honour'd daughter of my royal master,
 Like thee, confin'd within these lonely walls,
 The secrets of a vile abandon'd court,
 Do seldom reach Pammenes ; but, 'tis rumour'd,
 The jealous tyrant brings Electra here,
 Fearful least Argos, by her cries alarm'd,
 Shou'd rise to vengeance ; ev'ry heart, he knows,
 Feels for the injur'd princes, therefore much
 He dreads her clamours ; with a watchful eye
 Observes her conduct, treats her as a slave,
 And leads the captive to adorn his triumph.

IPHISA.

Good heav'n ! and must Electra be a slave !
 Shall Agamemnon's blood be thus disgrac'd
 By a barbarian ? Will her cruel mother,
 Will Clytemnæstra bear the vile reproach
 That on herself recoils, and all her race ?
 Perhaps my sister is too fierce of soul,
 She mingles too much pride and bitterness
 Of keen resentment with her griefs ; alafs !
 Weak are her arms against a tyrant's pow'r :
 What will her anger, what her pride avail her ?
 They only irritate a haughty foe,

And

And cannot serve our cause: my fate at least
Is milder, and this solitary state
Shields me from wrongs which must oppress Electra.
Far from my father's foes, these pious hands
Can pay due off'rings to his honour'd shade:
Far from his marth'rer, in this sad retreat
Freely I weep in peace, and curse $\overline{\text{Æ}}$ gisthus:
I'm not condemn'd to see the tyrant here,
Save when the Sun unwillingly brings round
The fatal day that knit the dreadful tie,
When that inhuman monster shed the blood
Of Agamemnon, when base Clytemnæstra ——

S C E N E II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PAMMENES.

IPHISA.

O my Ele~~stra~~! art thou here? my sister —

ELECTRA.

The day of horror is return'd, Iphisa:
The dreadful rites, the guilty feast prepar'd,
Have brought me hither; thy Electra comes,
Thy captive sister, comes a wretched slave,
To bear the tidings of their guilty joy.

IPHISA.

IPHISA.

To see Electra is a bleffing still,
 It pours some joy into the bitter cup
 Qf sorrow, thus to mix my tears with thine.

ELECTRA.

Tears, my Iphisa ! I have shed enough
 Of them already : O thou bleeding ghost
 Of my dead father, ever-honour'd shade,
 Is that the tribute which I owe to thee ?
 I owe thee blood, and blood thou hast requir'd :
 Amid'st the pomp of this dire festival,
 Dragg'd by Ægisthus here, I will collect
 My scatter'd spirits, shake off these vile chains,
 And be my own avenger : yes, Iphisa,
 This feeble arm shall reach the tyrant's heart :
 Did not the cruel Clytemnæstra shed
 A husband's blood ? did I not see her lift
 Her barb'rous hand against him, and shall we
 Suspend the blow, and let a murth'rer live ?
 O vengeance, and thou, animating virtue,
 That doft inspire me, art thou not as bold
 As daring guilt ? we must revenge ourselves,
 We must, Iphisa : fear'st thou then to strike,
 Fearst thou to die ? shall Clytemnæstra's daughter,

Thy

The blood of Atreus fear ? O rather lend
Thy aid, and join the desperate Electra.

IPHIS A.

My dearest sister, moderate thy rage,
And calm thy troubled mind : against our foes
What can we bring but unavailing tears ?
Who will assist us ? who will lend us arms ?
Or how shall we surprise a watchful king,
For guilt is ever fearful, by his guards
Surrounded ? why, Electra, wilt thou court
Perpetual danger ? shou'd the tyrant hear
Thy loud complaints, I tremble for thy life.

E L E C T R A.

Why let him hear them : I wou'd have my grief
Sink to his heart, and poison all his joys :
Yes ; I wou'd have my cries ascend to heav'n,
And bring the thunder down ; wou'd have them raise
A hundred kings, who never yet have dar'd,
Unworthy cowards as they are, t' avenge
Great Agamemnon : but I pardon thee,
And the vain terrors of thy fearful soul,
That shrinks at danger ; for he favours you,
I know he does, and only crushes me
Beneath his iron yoke : thou hast not been,

Like me, a wretched persecuted slave ;
 Thou didst not see the impious parricide,
 The horrid * feast, the dire solemnity,
 When Clytemnæstra — O the dreadful image
 Is still before me, in this place, Iphisa,
 Where now thou tremblest to declare thy wrongs,
 There did these eyes behold our hapless father
 Caught in the deadly snare : Pammenes heard
 His dying groans, and ran with me to save him :
 But when I came, what did I see ! my mother
 Plunging her ruthless dagger in his breast,
 To rob him of the poor remains of life.

[Turning to Pammenes.]

Thou saw'st me take Orestes in my arms,
 My dear Orestes ; little knew he then
 Of danger, but as near his murther'd father
 He stood, call'd out for aid to Clytemnæstra :
 She, midst the horrors of the guilty scene,
 Stopp'd for a moment short, and gave us time
 Safe to convey the victim from Ægisthus.

* Nothing cou'd add more to the horror of the crime than such a circumstance. Clytemnæstra, not content with murthering her husband, instituted a solemn feast in commemoration of the happy event, and call'd it, with cruel raillery, the supper of Agamemnon. Dinius, in his history of Argos, informs us, it was on the 13th of the month Gamelion, which answers to the beginning of our January.

Whether the tyrant has completed yet
 Th' imperfect vengeance in Orestes' blood,
 I know not : O my brother, dost thou live,
 Or hast thou follow'd thy unhappy father ?
 Alas ! I weep for him, and fear for thee.
 These hands are loaded with inglorious chains,
 And these sad eys, for ever bath'd in tears,
 See nought but guilt, oppression, and despair.

PAMMENES.

Ye dear remains of Atreus' honour'd race,
 Whose splendor I have seen, whose woes I feel,
 Permit a friend to fill your weeping souls
 With cheerful hope, that ever waits propitious
 To sooth affliction : call to mind what heav'n
 Long since hath promis'd, that its vengeful hand
 Shou'd one day lead Orestes to the place
 Where we preserv'd him ; that Ægisthus there,
 Ev'n at yon tomb, and on the fatal day
 Mark'd for his impious triumph o'er the dead,
 Shou'd pay the forfeit of his crime : the Gods
 Can ne'er deceive ; in darkness still they veil
 Their secret purpose from the eyes of men,
 And punishment with slow but certain steps,
 Still follows guilt.

IPHISA.

But wherefore stays so long
 Their tardy vengeance? I have languish'd here
 In grief and anguish many a tedious hour;
 Electra, still more wretched, is in chains:
 Mean time the proud oppressor lives in peace,
 And glory's in his crimes.

ELECTRA.

Thou seest, Pammenes,
 Ægisthus still renew'st his cruel triumph,
 And celebrates the fatal nuptials; still
 A wretched exile lives my dear Orestes,
 Forgetful of his father, and Electra.

PAMMENES.

But mark the course of time: he touches now
 The age when manly strength, with courage join'd,
 May aid your purpose; hope for his return,
 And trust on heav'n.

ELECTRA.

We will: thou son of wisdom,
 Thou good old man, O thou hast darted forth
 A ray of hope on my despairing soul.
 If with unpitying eye the gods beheld
 Our mis'ries here, and proud oppression, still

Unpunish'd,

Unpunish'd, trampled on the tender feet
 Of innocence, what hand wou'd crown their altars
 With incense and oblation ! but kind heav'n
 Will give Orestes to a sister's tears,
 And blast the tyrant : hear my voice, Orestes,
 O hear thy country's, hear the cries of blood,
 That call thee forth ; come from thy dreary caves,
 And pathless desarts, where misfortune long
 Hath try'd thy courage ; leave thy savage prey,
 And all the roaming monsters of the forest,
 To chace the beasts of Argos, to destroy
 The tyrants of the earth, the murtherers
 Of kings ; O haste, and let me guide thy hand
 Ev'n to the traitor's breast.

IPHISA.

No more : repreſs
 Thy griefs, Electra, ſee thy mother comes.

ELECTRA.

And have I yet a mother ?

SCENE III.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Hence, and leave me ;
 You may retire, Pammeres ; stay, my daughters.

IPHISA.

Alas ! that sacred name dispels my fears.

ELECTRA.

And doubles mine.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Touching your fate, my children,
I came to lay a mother's heart before you.
Barren, thank heav'n, hath been my second bed,
Nor brought a race of jealous foes to sow
Division here. Alas ! my little race
Is almost run ; the secret grief that long
Hath prey'd on my sad heart will finish soon
A life of woe : spite of Ægisthus, still
I love my children ; spite of all his rage,
Electra, thou who in thy infant years
So oft hast giv'n me comfort, when the loss
Of Iphigenia, and her cruel father
Oppres'd my soul ; tho' now thy pride disdains me,
And braves my pow'r, thou art my daughter still ;
Unworthy as thou art, there's still a place
In Clytemnæstra's heart for her Electra.

ELECTRA.

For me ! O heav'n, and am I yet belov'd ;
And dost thou feel for thy unhappy daughter ?

O,

O, if thou dost, behold her chains, behold
Yon tomb —

CLYTEMNAESTRA.

Unkind Electra, thus to wake
The sad remembrance ! thou hast plung'd a dagger
Into thy mother's breast : but I deserve it.

ELECTRA.

Thou hast disarm'd Electra, nature pleads
A mother's cause ; I own myself to blame
For all the bitterness of sorrow pour'd
In dreadful execrations on thy head.
By thee deliver'd to the tyrant's pow'r,
I wou'd have torn thee from him ; I lament,
But cannot hate thee. O, if gracious heav'n
Hath touch'd thy soul with wholesome penitence,
Obey its sacred will, and hear the voice
Of conscience, that commands thee to unloose
The horrid ties that bind thee to a wretch
Despis'd and hated ; follow the great God
Who leads thy footsteps to the paths of virtue ;
Call back your son, let him return to fill
The throne of his great ancestors, to scourge
A tyrant, to revenge his murther'd father,
His sisters, and his mother : haste and send
For my Orestes.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Talk no more of that,
 Electra, nor speak thus of my *Æ*gisthus :
 I grieve to see thee in these shameful bonds ;
 But know, a sov'reign cannot tamely brook
 Repeated insults, or embrace a foe :
 You had provok'd him to be cruel ; I,
 Who am but his first subject, oft have try'd
 To sooth his anger, but in vain ; my words,
 Instead of healing, but inflam'd the wound :
 Electra is indebted to herself
 For all her deep-felt inj'ries ; henceforth bend
 'To thy condition ; let thy sister teach thee
 That we must yield submissive to our fate,
 If e'er we hope to change it. I cou'd wish
 To end my days in peace amongst my children ;
 But if thy rapid and imprudent zeal
 Should bring Orestes here before the time,
 His life might answer for it, and thy own,
 If the king see him : though I pity thee,
 Electra, yet I owe a husband more
 Than a lost son, whom I have cause to fear.

ELECTRA.

O heav'n, that monster ! he thy husband, he !
 And is it thus thou pity'st me ? alas,

What

What will this poor, this light remorse avail thee,
 This fleeting sorrow, was thy teaderness
 But for a moment, dost thou threaten me,

[To Iphisa.]

Is this, Iphisa, this a mother's love?

[To Clytemnestra.]

It seems you threaten my Orestes too ;
 You have no cause to fear, nor I to hope
 For him : alas ! perhaps he is no more ;
 Perhaps Ægisthus, the detested tyrant,
 He whom but now thou didst not blush to call
 Thy husband, hath in secret ta'en his life.

IPHISA.

Believe me, Madam, when I call the gods
 To witness, poor Electra and myself
 Are strangers to the fate of dear Orestes ;
 Have pity then on your afflicted daughters,
 Pity your hapless son, and spare Electra,
 She has been wrong'd ; her tears and her reproaches
 Suit well her fate, and ought to be forgiv'n.

ELECTRA.

I must not hope it, must not ev'n complain ;
 And if Orestes lives but in my thoughts
 'Tis deem'd a crime. I know Ægisthus well,
 Know his fierce nature, if he fears my brother,
 He'll soon destroy him.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Know, thy brother livcs;
 If he's in danger, 'tis from thy imprudence;
 Therefore be humble, moderate thy transports,
 Respect thy mother: think'ft thou I come here,
 Elate with joy, to lead the splendid triumph?
 O no, to me it is a day of sorrow;
 Thou weep'ft in chains, and I upon a throne.
 I know the cruel vows thy hatred made
 Against me: O, Electra! cease thy pray'rs,
 The gods have heard thee but too well already:
 Retire, and leave me.

S C E N E IV.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA alone.

How it shocks my soul
 To see my children! O the guilty bed!
 My fatal marriage, and long prosp'rous crimes,
 Adultery and murder, horrid bonds!
 How ye torment me now! my little dream
 Of happiness is o'er, and conscience darts
 Its sudden rays on my affrighted soul.
 How can Ægisthus live so long in peace!
 Fearless he leads me on to share with him
 These cruel triumphs; but my spirits fail,

My strength forsakes me, and I tremble now
 At ev'ry omen, fear my subjects, fear
 All Argos, Greece, Electra, and Orestes.
 How dreadful 'tis to hate the blood that flow'd
 Congenial with our own, to dread the names
 Which mortals hold so sacred and so dear !
 But injur'd nature, banish'd from my heart,
 Indignant frowns, and to avenge herself
 Now bids me tremble at the name of son.

S C E N E V.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Cruel Ægisthus, wherefore wou'dst thou lead me
 To this sad place, the seat of death and horror ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Is then the solemn pomp, the feast of joy,
 The sweet remembrance of our prosp'rous days,
 Grown hateful to thee, is our marriage day
 A day of horror ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

No: but here, Ægisthus,

There may be danger: my unhappy children
 Have fill'd this heart with anguish: poor Iphisa

Weeps

Weeps her hard lot ; Electra is in chains ;
 This fatal place reminds me of the blood
 We shed, reminds me of my dear Orestes,
 Of Agamemnon.

ÆGISTHUS.

Let Iphisa weep,
 And proud Electra rave ; I bore too long
 Her bitter taunts, 'tis fit her haughtiness
 Shou'd now be humbled ; I'll not suffer her
 To stir up foul rebellion in my kingdom,
 To tell the factious that Orestes comes,
 And call down vengeance on me ; every hour
 That hated name is echo'd in my ear,
 I must not bear it.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Ha ! what name was that ?
 Orestes ! O, I shudder at the thought
 Of his approach : an oracle long since
 Declar'd, that here, ev'n at the fatal tomb
 Whither thou lead'ft, his parricidal hand
 Shou'd one day rise vindictive, and destroy us,
 Why therefore woud'ft thou tempt the gods, why thus
 Expose a life so dear to Clytemnæstra ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Be not alarm'd ; Orestes ne'er shall hurt thee :

His

His be the danger ; for I have sent forth
 Some friends in search of him, and soon I hope
 Shall see him in the toils ; a wretched exile
 From clime to clime he roams, and now it seems
 In Epidaurus' gloomy forest hides
 His ignominious head ; but there perhaps
 We have more friends than Clytemnæstra thinks of ;
 The king may serve us.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But, my son — —

ÆGISTHUS.

I know

He's fierce, implacable, revengeful ; stung
 By his misfortunes, all the blood of Atreus
 Boils in his breast, and animates his rage.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas ! my Lord, his rage is but too just.

ÆGISTHUS.

Be it our bus'ness then to make it vain ;
 Thou know'st I've sent my Pliethenes in secret
 To Epidaurus.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But for what ?

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

To fix

My thone in safety, and remove thy fears :
 Yes, Plisthenes, my son, by thee adopted
 Heir to my kingdom, knows too well how much
 His int'rest must depend on the event
 E'er to neglect his charge : he is thy son,
 Think of no other : had Electra's heart
 Submissive yielded to another's counsels,
 She had been happy in my Plisthenes :
 But she shall feel the pow'r which she contemns,
 She and her haughty brother, her Orestes,
 He may be found perhaps. — You seem disturb'd.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas ! Ægisthus, must we sacrifice
 More victims ? must I purchase length of days
 With added guilt ? Thou know'st whose blood we
 shed —
 And must my son too perish, must I pay
 So dear a price for life ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Remember —

CLYTEM-

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

No:

First let me ask the sacred oracle—

ÆGISTHUS.

What canst thou hope from gods or oracles,
 Were they consulted on the blissful day
 That gave Ægisthus to his Clytemnæstra ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Thou ha'st recall'd a time when heav'n, I fear,
 Was much offended : love defies the gods,
 But fear adores them ; guilt weighs down my soul,
 Do not oppress my feeble spirits ; time,
 That changes all, hath alter'd this proud heart ;
 The hand of heav'n is on me, and subdues
 The haughty rage that once inspir'd my breast ;
 Not that my tender friendship for Ægisthus
 Can e'er decay, our int'rests are the same ;
 But to behold my daughter made a slave,
 To think on my poor lost abandon'd son,
 To think that now, ev'n now, perhaps he dies
 By vile assassins, or, if living, lives
 My foe, and hates the guilty Clytemnæstra,
 Is it not dreadful ? pity me, Ægisthus,
 I am a mother still.

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou art my wife;
 Thou art my queen; resume thy wonted courage,
 And be thyself again; indulge no more
 This foolish fondness for ungrateful children,
 Who merit not thy love; consult alone
 Ægisthus' safety, and thy own repose.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Repose! the guilty mind can ne'er enjoy it.

END of the FIRST ACT.

A C T II. S C E N E I.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

W HITHER, my Pylades, hath cruel fate
 Conducted us? alas! Orestes lives
 But to increase the sorrows of his friend:
 Our arms, our treasures, and our soldiers lost
 In the rude storm; here on this desert coast,
 No succour near, deserted and forlorn
 We wander on, and nought but hope remains.
 Where are we?

P Y L A D E S.

PYLADES.

That I know not; but since fate
 Hath led us hither, let us not despair;
 It is enough for me, Orestes lives:
 Be confident; the barbarous Ægisthus
 In vain pursued thy life, which heav'n preserv'd
 In Epidaurus, when thy arm subdued
 The gallant Plithenes: let nought alarm
 Or terrify thy soul, but boldly urge
 Thy way, protected by that guardian God
 Who watches o'er the just, the great avenger,
 Who hath already to thy valour giv'n
 The son, and promis'd that e'er long the father
 Shall follow him.

ORESTES.

Alas, my friend, that God
 In anger now withdraws his pow'ful aid,
 And frowns upon us, as thy cruel fate
 Too plainly shews; a terrible example!

But say, within the rock didst thou conceal
 The urn, which to Mycenæ, horrid seat
 Of murther, by the gods command, we bear;
 That urn which holds the ashes of my foe,
 Of Plithenes; with that we must deceive
 The tyrant.

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

I have done it.

ORESTES.

Gracious heav'n !

When shall we reap the fruits of our obedience ?
 When will the wish'd-for day of vengeance come ?
 Shall I again behold my native soil,
 The dear, the dreadful place where first I saw
 The light of day ? Where shall I find my sister,
 The pride, the glory, of admiring Greece ;
 That gen'rous maid, whom all unite to praise,
 But none will dare to succour ? She preserv'd
 My life ; and, worthy of her noble father,
 Hath never bent beneath th'oppressive hand
 Of pow'r, but brav'd the fury of the storm.
 How many kings, how many heroes, fought
 For Menelaus ! Agamemnon dies,
 And Greece forgets him, whilst his hapless son,
 Deserted, wanders o'er a faithless world,
 To seek some blest asylum for repose.
 Alas, without thy friendship I had been
 The most distres'd, most abject of mankind :
 But heav'n, in pity to my woes, hath sent
 My Pylades ; it wou'd not let me perish,
 But gave me to subdue my hated foe,

And

And half revenge my father : say, my friend,
What path will leads us the tyrant's court ?

PYLADES.

Behold that palace, and the tow'ring height
Of yon proud temple, the dark grove o'ergrown
With Cypress, and the tomb, rich images
Of mournful splendor all: and see ! this way
Advancing, comes a venerable sage,
Of mildest aspect, and whose years, no doubt,
Have long experience of calamity ;
His soul will melt at thy disastrous fate.

ORESTES.

Is ev'ry mortal born to suffer ? hark !
He groans, my Pylades.

S C E N E . II.

ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

PYLADES.

Whoe'er thou art,
Stop, and inform us : we are strangers here.
Two poor unhappy friends, long time the sport
Of winds and waves, now on this unknown shore
Cast helpless, can't thou tell us if this place
Will be or fatal to us, or propitious ?

PAMMENES.

PAMMENES.

I am a simple, plain old man, and here
 Worship the gods, adore their justice, live
 In humble fear of them, and exercise
 The sacred rights of hospitality ;
 Ye both are welcome to my little cottage,
 There to despise with me the pride of kings,
 Their pomp and riches : come, my friends, for such
 I ever hold the wretched.

ORESTES.

Gen'rous stranger,
 May gracious heav'n inspire us with the means
 To recompence thy goodness ! but inform us
 What place is this ; who is your king ?

PAMMENES.

*AEG*isthus :
 I am his subject.

ORESTES.

Terrors, crimes, and vengeance !
 O Heav'n, *AEG*isthus !

PYLADES.

Soft : do not betray us ;
 Be careful.

ORESTES.

Gods, *AEG*isthus ! he who murther'd ——

ÆGISTHUS.

PAMMENES

PAMMENES.

The same.

ORESTES.

And Clytemnæstra, lives she still
After that fatal blow ?

PAMMENES.

She reigns with him ;
The rest is known too well.

ORESTES.

That tomb before us,
And yonder palace ——

PAMMENES.

Is inhabited
Now by Ægisthus ; built, I well remember,
By worthier hands, and for a better use.
The tomb thou see'st, forgive me if I weep
At the remembrance, is the tomb of him
I lov'd, my lord, my king — of Agamemnon.

ORESTES.

O 'tis too much ! I sink beneath it.

PYLADES.

Hide

Thy tears, my friend.

To

[To Orestes, who turns away from him.

PAMMENES.

You seem much mov'd, and fain

Wou'd stop the tide of grief: O give it way,
Indulge thy sorrows, and lament the son
Of gods, the noble conqueror of Troy;
Whilst they insult his sacred mem'ry here,
Strangers shall weep the fate of Agamemnon.

ORESTES.

A stranger as I am, I cannot look
With cold indiff'rence on the noble race
Of Atreus, 'tis a Grecians duty ever
To weep the fate of heroes, and I ought ——
But doth Electra live in Argos still?

PAMMENES.

She doth, she's here.

ORESTES.

I run, I fly to meet her.

PYLADES.

Ha! whether woud'st thou go! what, brave the gods!
Hazard thy precious life! forbear, my lord.

[To Pammenes.

O, sir, conduct us to the neigh'ring temple,

There

There will we lay our gifts before the altar
 In humble duty, and adore that God
 Who rul'd the waves, and fav'd us from destruction.

ORESTES.

Wilt thou conduct us to the sacred tomb
 Where lie the ashes of a murther'd hero ?
 There must I offer to his honour'd shade
 A secret sacrifice.

PAMMENES.

O Heav'nly justice,
 Thou sacrifice to him ! amidst his foes !
 O noble youth ! my master had a son,
 Who, in Electra's arms—but I forbear,
 Ægisthus comes : away ; I'll follow you.

ORESTES.

Ægisthus ! ha !

PYLADES.

We must avoid his presence.

S C E N E. III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, PAMMENES.

ÆGISTHUS.

[To Pammenes.

Who are those strangers ? one of them methought
 Seem'd, by his stately port and fair demeanor,

Of

Of noble birth, a gloom of melancholy
 Hangs on his brow : he struck me as he past :
 Is he our subject? know you whence he came?

PAMMENES.

I only know they are unfortunate ;
 Driv'n by the tempest on those rocks, they came
 For shelter here ; as strangers I reliev'd them ;
 It was my duty : if they tell me truth,
 Greece is their country.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou shalt answser for them
 On peril of thy life.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Alas! my lord,
 Can these poor objects raise suspicion?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes :
 The people murmur ; ev'ry thing alarms me.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Such for these fifteen years hath been our fate,
 To fear, and to be fear'd ; the bitter poison
 To all my happiness.

ÆGISTHUS.

Away, Pammenes ;
 Let me know who and whence they are ; why thus

They

They come so near the palace; from what port
 Their vessel sail'd, and wherefore on the seas.
 Where I command: away, and bring me word.

S C E N E IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

ÆGISTHUS.

Well, madam, to remove your idle fears,
 Th' interpreters of heav'n it seems at length
 Have been consulted; but in vain: their silence
 Doubles your grief, and heighthens your despair;
 For to thyself, thy restless spirit ne'er
 Will know repose; thou tremblest at the thought
 Of thy son's death, yet fear'st his dang'rous life:
 Consult no more your doubtful oracles,
 And hesitating priests, that brood in secret
 O'er the dark bosom of futurity;
 But hear Ægisthus, he shall give thee peace,
 And satisfy thy soul: this hand determines,
 This tongue pronounces Clytemnæstra's fate;
 If thou woud'st live and reign, confide in me,
 And me alone, and let me hear no more
 Of your unworthy son; but for Electra,
 She's to be fear'd, and we must think of her:
 Perhaps her marriage with my Plisthenes
 Might stop the mouth of faction, and appease

The discontented people : thou woud'st wish
 To see the deadly hatred, that so long
 Hath raged between us, soften'd into peace ;
 To see our int'rests and our hearts united :
 Let it be so. Go thou, and talk with her ;
 But take good heed her pride refuses not
 The proffer'd boon, that were an insult soon
 She might repent of ; but I hope with you,
 That slav'ry hath bow'd down her haughty spirit,
 That this unhop'd for unexpected change
 From poverty and chains to rank and splendor,
 Join'd to a mother's kind authority,
 And above all, Ambition, will persuade her
 To seize the golden minute, and be wise :
 But if she spurns the happiness that courts her,
 Her insolence shall meet its due reward.
 Your foolish fondness, and her father's name,
 Have fed her pride too long ; but let her dread,
 If she submits not, a severer fate,
 Chains heavier far, and endless banishment.

S C E N E. V.

C L Y T E M N A E S T R A, E L E C T R A.

C L Y T E M N A E S T R A.

B
M
B
Come near, my daughter, and with milder looks
 Behold thy mother : I have mourn'd in secret,

And

And wept with thee thy hard and cruel bondage,
 Though not unmerited ; for sure thy hatred
 Was most unjust, Electra : as a Queen,
 I was offended ; as a mother, griev'd ;
 But I have gain'd your pardon, and your rights
 Are all restor'd.

ELECTRA.

O madam, at your feet —

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

But I wou'd still do more.

ELECTRA.

What more ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Support

Your race, restore the honour'd name of Pelops,
 And re-unite his long-divided children.

ELECTRA.

Ha ! talk'st thou of Orestes ? speak, go on.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I speak of thee, and hope at last Electra
 Will be Electra's friend : I know thy soul
 Aspires to empire, be thyself again,
 And let thy hopes transport thee to the throne
 Of Argos and Mycenæ ; rise from chains

And ignominious slav'ry to the throne
 Of thy great ancestors : *Ægisthus* yields
 To my intreaties, as a daughter yet
 He wou'd embrace thee, to his *Plisthenes*
 Wou'd join *Eleætra*; ev'ry hour the youth
 From *Epidaurus* is expected here;
 When he returns he weds you : look, my daughter,
 Tow'rds the bright prospect of thy future glory,
 And bury all the past in deep oblivion.

E L E C T R A.

Can I forget the past, or look with joy
 On that which is to come ? O cruel fate,
 This is the worst indignity that e'er
Electra bore : remember whence I sprang,
 Remember, I am *Agamemnon*'s daughter,
 And woud'ft thou bind me to his murth'rer's son ?
 Give me my chains again, oppress my soul
 With all the horrors of base servitude ;
 All that the tyrant e'er inflicted on me,
 Shame and reproach suit with my sad condition ;
 I have supported them, and look'd on death
 Without a fear : a thousand times *Ægisthus*
 Hath threaten'd me with death, but this is worse;
 Thou art more cruel far to ask my vows,

T
B
M
B

My

My love, my honour ; but I see your aim,
 I know your purpose ; poor Orestes slain,
 His murth'rer trembles at a sister's claim,
 And dreads my title to a father's throne :
 The tyrant wants my hand to second him,
 To seal his poor precarious rights with mine,
 And make me an accomplice in his guilt :
 O if I have a right Ægisthus fears,
 Let him erase my title in my blood,
 And tear it from me : if another arm
 Be needful to his purpose, lend him thine ;
 Strike here, and join Electra to her brother ;
 Strike here, and I shall know 'tis Clytemnæstra.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

It is too much : ungrateful as thou art,
 I pity'd thee ; but all my hopes are past :
 What have I done, what wou'd I do, to bend
 Thy stubborn heart ? tears, menaces, reproaches,
 And love and tenderness, the throne itself,
 Which but for me thou never coud'st have hop'd,
 Pray'rs, punishment, and pardon, nought avail'd,
 And now I yield thee to thy fate : farewell !
 Thou say'ft that thou shalt know me for thy mother,
 For Clytemnæstra, by my cruelty :

I am thy mother, and I am thy Queen,
 Remember that; to Agamemnon's race
 Nought do I owe but hatred and revenge;
 I will not warm a serpent in my breast
 To sting me: henceforth storm, complain, and weep,
 I shall not heed the clamours of a slave:
 I lov'd thee once, with grief I own I lov'd thee;
 But from this hour remember Clytemnæstra
 Is not thy mother, but Ægisthus' wife;
 The bonds are broken that united us,
 Eleætra broke them; nature hath disclaim'd,
 And I abjure them.

S C E N E . VI.

ELECTRA. alone

Gracious heavn! is this
 A mother's voice? O day the bitt'rest sure
 That ever rose since my dear father's death!
 I fear I said too much, but my full heart,
 Spite of myself, wou'd pour its venom forth:
 She told me my Orestes was no more;
 Cou'd I bear that? O if a cruel mother
 Has robb'd me of my best, my dearest treasure,
 Why shou'd I court my worst of foes, why fawn
 And cringe to her, to live a vile dependant

A
T
B
M
B

On

On her precarious bounties ; to lift up
 These wither'd hands to unrelenting heav'n,
 To see my father's bed and throne usurp'd
 By this base spoiler, this inhuman tyrant,
 Who robb'd me of a mother's heart; and now
 Hath ta'en Orestes from me ?

S C E N E . VII.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

O Electra,

Complain no more.

ELECTRA.

Why not?

IPHISA.

Partake my joy.

ELECTRA.

Joy is a stranger to this heart, Iphisa,
 And ever shall be.

IPHISA.

Still there's hope.

ELECTRA.

O no,

Still must we weep : for if I may believe

A mother, our dear brother, our Orestes,
Is dead.

IPHISA.

And if I may believe these eyes,
He lives, he's here, Electra.

ELECTRA.

Can it be?

Good heav'n! O do not trifl with a heart
Like mine: Iphisa, did'st thou say Orestes?

IPHISA.

I did.

ELECTRA.

Thou woud'st not with a flatt'ring dream
Deceive me, my Iphisa — but, go on,
For hope and fear distract me.

IPHISA.

O my fister,
Two strangers, cast by some benignant God
On these unhappy coasts, are just arriv'd,
And hither, by the care of good Pammenes,
Conducted; one of them —

ELECTRA.

I faint: I die —
Well, one of them —

IPHISA

IPHISA.

I saw the noble youth :

O what a lustre sparkled in his eye !
 His air, his mein, his ev'ry gesture bore
 The perfect semblage of a demi-god ;
 Ev'n as they paint th' illustrious Grecian chief,
 The conqueror of Troy ; such majesty
 And sweet deportment ne'er did I behold ;
 But with Pammenes he retir'd, and hid
 His beauteous form from my desiring eyes :
 Struck with the charming image, and amaz'd,
 I ran to seek thee here, beneath the shade
 Of this dark grove, to tell the pleasing tale :
 But mark what follow'd — on the sacred tomb,
 Where we so oft have mingled our sad tears,
 I saw fresh garlands, saw the votive wreath,
 The water sprinkled o'er it, and the hair
 Doubtless of those whom I so late had seen,
 Th' illustrious strangers : near to these was laid,
 What most confirm'd my hopes, a glitt'ring sword,
 That spoke methought the day of vengeance near :
 Who but a son, a brother, and a hero,
 Rais'd by the gods to save his falling country,
 Wou'd dare to brave the tyrant thus ? 'Tis he,
 Electra, heav'n hath sent him to our aid,

The light'ning glares upon us, and the thunder
Will soon be heard.

ELECTRA.

I must believe Iphisa,
And hope the best; but is it not a snare
Laid by the tyrant? Come! we'll know the truth,
Let us away — I must be satisfy'd.

IPHISA.

We must not search him in the dark retreat
Where he is hid, Pammenes says, his life
Wou'd answer for it.

ELECTRA.

Ha! what dost thou say?

Alas! we are deceiv'd, betray'd, Iphisa,
By cruel heav'n: thus, after fifteen years,
Restor'd, Orestes wou'd have ran with joy
To the dear arms that sav'd him, wou'd have chear'd
Electra's mournful heart, he ne'er had fled
From thee, Iphisa: O that sword thou saw'ft,
Which rais'd thy sanguine hope, alarms my fears;
A cruel mother wou'd be well inform'd,
And in her eyes I read the barb'rous joy
She felt within: O dart one ray of hope,
Ye vengeful gods, on my despairing soul!

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B

Will

Will not Pammenes yield to my intreaties?
He will; he must: away, I'll speak to him.

IPHISA.

Do not, Electra; think what cruel eyes
Watch o'er our steps, and mark our ev'ry action.
If he is come, we shall discover him
By our fond zeal, and hazard his sweet life:
If we're deceiv'd, our search but irritates
The tyrant, and endangers good Pammenes:
But let us pay our duty at the tomb,
There we at least may weep without offence.
Who knows, Electra, but the noble stranger
May meet us in that blest asylum; there
That heav'n, whose goodness thy impatient rage
Hath call'd in question, may yet hear my vows,
And give him to our wishes and our tears:
Let us be gone.

ELECTRA.

Thou hast reviv'd my hopes:
But O! I die with grief, if thou deceiv'ſt me.

END of the SECOND ACT.

S C E N E

ACT III. SCENE I.

ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

[A Slave at the further end of the stage carrying an urn, and a sword.]

PAMMENES.

BLEST be the day that to our wishes thus
 Restores the long-expected hope of Greece,
 My royal master's son, the minister
 Of heav'ns high will, to execute swift vengeance
 On Agamemnon's foes ! The tyrant long
 Hath dreaded, long foreseen th' impending blow ;
 Conscious of guilt, in ev'ry face unknown
 Still he beholds his master and his judge,
 And still Orestes haunts his troubled soul :
 Much he enquires concerning you, and longs
 To see you both. I have a thousand fears,
 A thousand hopes ; heav'n grant we may succeed !
 Mean time I have obey'd your orders, founded
 The people's hearts, and strove to animate
 Their zeal ; inspir'd them with the distant hope
 Of an avenger ; soon or late the race
 Of rightful kings must prosper : ev'ry heart
 Glow'd with warm transport at Orestes' name ;
 Awaken'd from her slumber, vengeance rises

With

With double vigour ; my few faithful friends,
Who dwell in this lone desert with Pammenes,
Lift up their hands to heav'n, and call on thee ;
And yet I tremble to behold thee here
Unarm'd and unassisted, least some chance
Discover thee, and blast our hopes : the foe
Is barb'rous, active, vigilant, and bold ;
One fatal stroke may ruin all ; whilst thou,
Against a tyrant seated on his throne,
Bring'ſt nothing but Orestes, and his friend.

PYLADES.

And are not they sufficient ? 'Tis the work
Of heav'n that oft fulfills its own designs
By means most wonderful, that in the deep
O'erwhelm'd our little all, and here alone
Hath left us to perform the sacrifice.
Sometimes it arms the sov'reigns of the earth
With tenfold vengeance ; sometimes, in contempt
Of human valour, strikes in awful silence ;
Nature and friendship then assert the rights
Of heav'n, and vindicate its pow'r divine.

ORESTES.

Orestes asks no other aid, no arm
But thine, my Pylades.

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

Take heed, my friend,
 Quit not the paths of safety pointed out
 By the just gods; remember thou art bound
 By solemn oath to hide thee from Electra;
 Your peace, your happiness, your kingdom, all
 Depend upon it: O refrain your transports,
 Dissemble, and obey; 'tis fit Electra
 Shou'd be deceiv'd, ev'n more than Clytemnæstra.

PAMMENES.

Thank heav'n, that thus ordain'd it for thy safety.
 Already hath Electra, bath'd in tears,
 And calling for her great avenger, fill'd
 These solitary mansions with her cries;
 Importunate and bold, she fought me out,
 And with imprudent warmth, demanded loud,
 Where was her brother, where her dear Orestes:
 Nature had whisper'd to her anxious heart
 He was not far from his Electra: scarce
 Cou'd I withhold her eager steps.

ORESTES.

Ye gods!
 Must I refrain? O insupportable!

E
N
B

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

You hesitate; O think, my dear Orestes,
 Think on the menaces of angry heav'n,
 Think on its goodness that preserv'd thy life
 From ev'ry danger; if thou should'st oppose
 Its sacred will, eternal wrath awaits
 To blast thy purpose; tremble, son of Atreus
 And Tantalus, remember what thy hapless race
 Hath suffer'd, nor expect a milder doom.

ORESTES.

What pow'r invincible presides unseen
 O'er human actions, and directs our fate?
 Is it a crime to listen to the voice
 Of fond affection? O eternal justice,
 Thou deep abyfs, unsearchable to man!
 Shall not our weakness and our guilt by thee
 Be still distinguish'd? shall the man who wanders
 From virtue's paths unknowing, and who braves
 Thy pow'r, shall he who yields to nature's laws,
 And he who breaks them, share an equal fate?
 But shall the slave condemn his master? heav'n
 Gave us our being, and can owe us nothing:
 Therefore no more: in silence I obey.
 Give me the urn, the ring, and bloody sword,
 Which thou hast hither brought, they shall be offer'd

Far

Far from Electra's sight : let us be gone ;
I'll see my sister when I have reveng'd her.

[Turning to Pammenes.]

Go thou, Pammenes, and prepare the hearts
Of thy brave followers for the great event
Which Greece awaits, and I must execute :
Deceive Ægisthus, and my guilty mother ;
Let them enjoy the transitory bliss,
The short-liv'd pleasure of Orestes' death,
If an unnat'ral mother can behold
With joy the ashes of a murther'd son :
Here will I wait, and stop them as they pass.

S C E N E II.

ELECTRA and IPHISIA on one side of the stage,
ORESTES and PYLADES on the other, with a
slave carrying an urn and a sword.

ELECTRA.

[To Iphisa.]

Hope disappointed is the worst of sorrows.
O my Iphisa, all thy flatt'ring dreams
Are vanish'd, and Pammenes, with a word,
Hath undeciv'd us ; the fair day that shone
So bright is clouded o'er, and darkness spreads
On ev'ry side : alas ! our wretched life
Is but a round of never-ending woes.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

[To Pylades,

Two women, and in tears !

PYLADES.

Alas, my lord,

Beneath a tyrant all things wear the face
Of grief and mis'ry.

ORESTES.

In Ægisthus' court

Nothing shou'd reign but sorrow.

IPHISA.

[To Electra.

Look, Electra,

The strangers come this way.

ELECTRA.

Unhappy omen !

They did pronounce Ægisthus' hated name.

IPHISA.

One is that hero whom I told thee of;

The noble youth —

ELECTRA.

[Looking at Orestes.

Alas ! I too, like thee,

Had been deceiv'd.

[Turning

[Turning to Orestes.]

Who are ye, wretched strangers;
And what hath led you to this fatal shore?

O R E S T E S.

We come to see the king who reigns in Argos,
And take our orders from him.

E L E C T R A.

Are ye Grecians,
And call ye him a king, the murtherer
Of Agamemnon?

O R E S T E S.

He is sov'reign here,
And heav'n commands us to respect his throne,
Not to dispute his title.

E L E C T R A.

Horrid maxim!
And what have you to ask of this proud king,
This bloody monster here?

O R E S T E S.

We come to bring him
Some happy tidings.

E L E C T R A.

Dreadful then to us
They must be.

I P H I S A.

I P H I S A . [Seeing the Urn .

Ha ! an urn ! O grief, O horror !

P Y L A D E S .

Orestes —

E L E C T R A .

O ye gods ! Orestes dead !

I faint, I die.

O R E S T E S .

What have we done, my friend ?

They cou'd not be mistaken, for their grief
Betrays them : O ! my blood runs cold.—Fair princess,
Be comforted, and live.

E L E C T R A .

Orestes dead ?

And can I live ? O no, barbarians, here
Complete your cruelty.

I P H I S A .

Alas ! you see
The poor remains of Agamemnon ; we
Are his unhappy daughters, the sad sisters
Of lost Orestes.

O R E S T E S .

O Electra ! O
Iphisa ! O where am I ? cruel gods ![To the slave carrying the urn .
Take from their sight those monuments of woe ,

That

That fatal urn, which ——

ELECTRA.

[Running towards the urn.

Woud'ſt thou take it from me ?

Woud'ſt thou deprive me of the little all

That's left Electra by offended heav'n ?

O give it me.

[She takes the urn, and embraces it.

ORESTES.

Forbear ; what woud'ſt thou do ?

PYLADES.

Away : Aegisthus only must receive

These precious reliques.

ELECTRA.

Must I then behold

My brother's ashes in a tyrant's hand,

And are Orestes' murtherers before me ?

ORESTES.

Horrid reproach ! it shocks my very soul :

I can no longer ——

ELECTRA.

Yet you weep with me :

O, in the name of the avenging gods,

If ye are guiltless, if your gen'rous hands
Collected his dear ashes — — —

ORESTES.

Gracious heav'n !

ELECTRA.

If ye lament his death, O answer me :
Who told you of his fate : art thou his friend ?
Speak, noble youth : both dumb ! yet both afflicted :
Ev'n whilst your words plant daggers in my heart,
Ye seem to pity me.

ORESTES.

It is too much ;

The gods have been obey'd enough already.

ELECTRA.

What say'st thou ?

ORESTES.

Leave those poor remains.

ELECTRA.

O no :

I never will : alas ! is ev'ry heart
Inflexible ? I tell thee, cruel stranger,
I must not, cannot give thee back again
The fatal gift thy pity hath bestow'd :
'Tis my Orestes ; and I will embrace him :
Behold his dying sister.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Cruel gods !

Where are your thunders now ? O strike : Electra,
I can no longer —

ELECTRA.

Ha !

ORESTES.

I ought —

PYLADES.

O heav'n !

ELECTRA.

Go on —

ORESTES.

Know then —

S C E N E III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ORESTES, PYLADES,
ELECTRA, IPHISA, PAMMENES, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

O glorious spectacle !

Fortune, I thank thee : Can it be, Pammenes ?
My rival dead ! it is, it must be true,
Electra's grief confirms it.

ELECTRA.

Dreadful hour ?

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

To what am I reserv'd ?

ÆGISTHUS..

Seize on the urn,

And wretched it from her.

[They take the urn from her.

ELECTRA.

O thou haft robb'd me of the only good
 This life cou'd e'er afford me, barb'rous monster !
 O take Electra too, tear forth this heart
 And join me to Orestes ; father, son,
 Sister, and brother, all thy wretched victims
 Unite to satiate thy revenge : now, tyrant,
 Enjoy thy happiness, enjoy thy crimes :
 And thou, inhuman mother, look with him
 On the delightful spectacle, it suits
 Thy nature, and is worthy of you both

[Iphisa leads her off.

S C E N E IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ORESTES,
 PYLADES, Guards.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA..

Must I bear this ?

ÆGISTHUS..

She shall be punish'd for it :

Let

Let her complain to heav'n, for heav'n itself
 Will justify \mathbb{A} egisthus ; it approves
 Where it forbids not ; therefore I am guiltless,
 And happy too : my throne stands firmly now,
 My life's in safety ; but I must reward
 The zeal and valour of these noble Grecians.

O R E S T E S .

It was our duty, royal sir, to lay
 These proofs before you : take this sword, this ring,
 You must remember it : 'twas Agamemnon's.

C L Y T E M N \mathbb{A} S T R A .

And was it then by thee Orestes fell ?

 \mathbb{A} E G I S T H U S .

If thou hast serv'd me, thine be the reward :
 But, say, who art thou, of what race ?

O R E S T E S .

My name
 Must not as yet be known ; perhaps hereafter
 It may be : in the fields of Troy my father
 Distinguish'd shone amongst the great avengers
 Of Menelaus ; in those days of glory
 He fought, and fell : deserted and forlorn,
 Left by a cruel mother, and pursued
 By most inhuman foes, this friend alone

Supported me ; was fortune, father, all :
 With him I still have trod the paths of honour,
 With him defy'd the malice of my fate :
 Such is my story.

ÆGISTHUS.

But say where thy arm
 Reveng'd me of this hated prince : inform me.

ORESTES.

'Twas in a wood that to the temple leads
 Of Epidaurus, near Achemor's tomb.

ÆGISTHUS.

The king had set a price upon his head :
 How came you not to ask for your reward ?

ORESTES.

Because I hated infamy, and fought
 For vengeance, not for hire ; I did not mean
 To sell his blood ; a private motive rais'd
 This arm against him, as my friend well knows,
 And I reveng'd myself without the aid
 Of kings, nor shall I boast the victory :
 Forgive me, sir : I tremble ; for the widow
 Of Agamemnon's here ; perhaps I've serv'd,
 Perhaps offended her ; I'll take my leave.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou shalt not ; stay, I charge thee.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Let him go :

That turn, and the sad story he has told,
 Have fill'd my soul with horror : heav'n, my lord,
 Protects your throne and life, be thankful for it,
 And leave a mother to indulge her sorrows.

ORESTES.

Madam, I thought that Agamemnon's son
 Was hateful to you.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I must own I fear'd him.

ORESTES.

Fear'd him ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I did indeed ; for he was born
 To be most guilty.

ORESTES.

Guilty ? and to whom ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

The wretched wanderer, thou know'st, was doom'd
 To hate a mother, doom'd to shed the blood
 From whence he sprang ; such was his horrid fate :
 Perhaps he had fulfill'd — and yet his death,

I know not why, affrights me, and I tremble
To look on you who sav'd me from his vengeance.

ORESTES.

Alas ! a son against a mother arm'd !
O who cou'd loose that sacred tye ? perhaps
He wish'd —

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O heav'n !

ÆGISTHUS.

What say'st thou ? didst thou know him ?

PYLADES.

[Aside.

He will discover all.

[To Ægisthus.

He did, my lord,
The wretched soon unite, and soon divide:
At Delphi first we saw him.

ORESTES.

Yes : I knew
His purpose well.

ÆGISTHUS.

What wa'st ?

ORESTES.

To murther thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

I've seen his malice long, but I despis'd it.

Mean time Electra us'd Orestes' name
 To spread division o'er my kingdom ; she
 Was my worst foe : thou hast reveng'd me of her,
 Take thy reward, I yield her to thy pow'r ;
 She shall be thine : the haughty maid, who spurn'd
 The great alliance with Ægisthus' son ;
 Henceforth she is thy slave : the wretched race
 Of Priam long beneath the conqu'rors yoke
 Submissive bow'd, and dragg'd the servile chain ;
 And wherefore shou'd not Agamemnon's blood
 Bend in its turn, and share an equal fate ?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Wou'd Clytemnæstra suffer that !

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou woud'ft not
 Defend thy worst of foes ; proscribe Orestes,
 Yet spare Electra.

[To Orestes.
 Leave the urn with me.

ORESTES.

We will, my lord, and shall accept your offer.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

That were to carry our resentment further

Than

Than justice warrants: let him hence, and bear
 Some other recompense: we too must go:
 Let us, my lord, I beg thee, let us quit
 These horrid mansions of the dead, where nought
 But dreadful images on ev'ry side
 Surround me: O! we never can prepare
 The bloody feast between the father's tomb
 And the son's ashes: how shall we invoke
 The houſhold gods, whom we have injur'd; how,
 Amid'ſt our cruel ſports, give up the blood
 Of Clytemnæſtra to the murtherer
 Of her Orestes? O it muſt not be;
 I tremble at the thought: my fears, Ægithus,
 Shou'd waken thine: this ſtranger rives my heart;
 His very fight is deadliest poison to me.
 Away, my lord, and let me be conceal'd
 From ev'ry eye; wou'd it were poſſible
 To hide me from myſelf!

[Exit Clytemnæſtra.

ÆGITHUS.

[To Orestes.

Stay thou, and wait
 Till I be befriended thee; nature for a moment
 Is clamorous and loud, but ſoon as reaſon
 Shall re-claim its empire, int'reſt then
 Muſt plead thy cauſe, and ſhe alone be heard.

Mean time remain with us, and celebrate
Our nuptial day :

[To one of his Attendants.

Haste you to Epidaurus,
And hither bring my son ; let him confirm
The welcome tidings.

S C E N E V.

O R E S T E S, P Y L A D E S.

O R E S T E S.

Yes, Orestes comes
To join the cruel pomp, and make thy feast
A feast of blood.

P Y L A D E S.

O how I trembled for thee !
I fear'd thy love ; I fear'd thy tenderness ;
And, more than all, thy honest rage, that burst
In transports forth when thou beheld'st the tyrant :
I saw thee ready to insult him ; saw
Thy soul take fire at Agamemnon's name,
And dreaded the sad consequence.

O R E S T E S.

My mother,
O Pylades, my mother pierc'd my heart.
Did'st thou not mark the workings of her soul
Whilst I was speaking ? O I felt them all.

Scarce cou'd my voice in fault'ring accents tell
 The melancholy tale, whilst Clytemnæstra
 Still gaz'd, and trembled still : a father's murther ;
 A sister unreveng'd ; a tyrant yet
 Unpunish'd ; and a mother to be taught
 Her int'rest and her duty ; what a weight
 Of secret cares ! great heav'n complete thy work !
 Urge on the ling'ring moments that retard
 My vengeance ; O let me perform the task
 Of love, and hatred ; let me mix the blood
 Of base Ægisthus with the vile remains
 Of Plisthenes ; let sweet Electra see
 The cruel tyrant gasping at my feet,
 And know her dear deliv'rer in Orestes !

S C E N E . VI.

O R E S T E S , P Y L A D E S , P A M M E N E S .

O R E S T E S .

What hast thou done, Pammenes, may we hope —

P A M M E N E S .

O my dear lord, ne'er, since the fatal day
 When Agamemnon fell, did greater perils
 Threaten thy precious life.

O R E S T E S .

Ha ! what hath happend ?

E 4

P Y L A D E S .

PYLADES.

Must I have cause to tremble for Orestes ?

Still

PAMMENES.

This instant is arriv'd a messenger
From Epidaurus, and e'er this related
The death of Pilisthenes.

PYLADES.

Immortal gods !

ORESTES.

And knows he that Orestes slew his son ?

PAMMENES.

They speak of nothing but his death ; e'er long
Fresh tidings are expected ; and the news
Mean time conceal'd from Greece that she has lost
One of her tyrants ; the king, still in doubt,
Shuts himself up with Clytemnestra : this
I learn'd from one, who, to the royal blood
Still faithful, pines in loathsome servitude
Beneath the proud usurper.

ORESTES.

I have gather'd
At least the first fair fruits of promis'd vengeance ;
Grant me, ye gods, to reap a plenteous harvest !
Think'ft thou, my friend, they wou'd uplift this arm
In vain, and only prosper to deceive me ;

To

To my successful valour give the son,
 And after yield me to the father's pow'r?
 Let us away: danger shou'd make us bold;
 Who fears not death is master of his foe;
 I'll feize the moment of uncertainty,
 E'er the full day of truth glares in upon him,
 And points his rage.

P A M M E N E S

Away: you must be known

To those few noble spirits who will die
 To serve their prince; this secret place conceals
 Some faithful friends, who may be still more useful,
 Because unknown.

P Y L A D E S.

Haste then; and if the tomb

Of thy dear father, if thy honour'd name
 Join'd to Electra's, if the wrath of heav'n
 Against usurpers, if the gracious gods
 Who hither led thee, if they all shou'd fail,
 If this detested spot is doom'd by fate
 To be thy grave, O take a wretched life
 To thee devoted, we will die together,
 That comfort's left; for Pylades shall fall
 Close by thy side, and worthy of Orestes.

ORESTES.

strike me, kind heav'n ! but O for pity save
His matchless valour, and protect my friend !

END of the THIRD ACT.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

ORESTES, PYLADES.

ORESTES.

PErhaps the vigilance of good Pammenes
May for a while remove the king's suspicions ;
And gracious heav'n, in pity to our woes,
Deceive Aegisthus to a fond belief,
That the devoted race of Tantalus
Is now no more ; but, O my Pylades,
The sword I offer'd at my father's tomb
Is stol'n by sacrilegious hands, that reach
Ev'n to the sacred mansions of the dead :
If it be carry'd to the tyrant, all
Will be discover'd ; let us haste, my friend,
And seize him, e'er it be too late.

PYLADES.

Pammenes

Is watchful o'er our int'rest ; we must wait
For him ; when we have gather'd the few friends

That

That mean to serve us, be this tomb the place
 Of meeting for us all, Pammenes then
 Will join us here.

ORESTES.

O Pylades, O heav'n!

This barb'rous law that forces me to wound
 A tender heart that lives but for Orestes !
 And must I leave Electra to her sorrows ?

PYLADES.

Yes : thou hast sworn it, therefore persevere ;
 Thou hast more cause to dread Electra now
 Than all thy foes ; she may destroy, but ne'er
 Can serve us, and the tyrant's eyes may soon
 Be open'd : O subdue, if possible,
 The pangs of nature, and conceal thy love :
 We came not here to comfort thy Electra,
 But to revenge her.

ORESTES.

See, my Pylades,

She comes this way, perhaps in search of me.

PYLADES.

Her ev'ry step is watch'd : you must not see her :
 Begone ; and doubt not, I'll observe her well ;
 The eyes of friendship seldom are deceiv'd.

SCENE

S C E N E II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PYLADES.

ELECTRA.

The villain hath escap'd me ; he avoids
My hated fight, and leaves me to my fate,
To fruitless rage, and unavailing tears,
Without the hope of vengeance : say, barbarian,
Thou vile accomplice in his crimes, where went
The murtherer, my tyrant, my new lord,
(For so it seems *Ægisthus* has decreed)
Where is he gone ?

PYLADES.

To do the will of heav'n,
In dutiful obedience to the gods ;
And well wou'd it become the royal maid
To follow his example : fate ofttimes
Deceives the hearts of men, directs in secret,
And guidestheir wand'ring stepsthrough pathsunknown:
Oftimes it sinks us in the deep abyss
Of mis'ry, and then raises us to joy ;
Binds us in chains, or lifts us to a throne,
And gives us life midst horrors, tombs, and death.
Complain no more, but yield to thy new sorrows ;
Be patient, and be happy : fare thee well.

S C E N E

S C E N E III.

E L E C T R A, I P H I S A.

E L E C T R A.

He swells my rage to fury and despair :
Thinks he I'll tamely bear these cruel insults ?
Cou'd not a father's and a brother's death
Fill up the measure of Electra's woes ;
But she must bend beneath the vile assassin
Of her Orestes ; be a common slave
To all the murth'lers of her hapless race ?
Thou dreadful sword, wet with Orestes' blood,
Expos'd in triumph at the sacred tomb,
Thou execrable trophy, for a moment
Thou did'st deceive me, but thou hast insulted
The ashes of the dead ; I'll make thee serve
A nobler purpose : tho' Ægisthus hides
His guilty head, and with the queen in secret
Plans future crimes, and meditates destruction,
Still we may find the murth'rer of Orestes ;
I cannot bathe me in the blood of both
My tyrants, but of one at least my soul
Shall be reveng'd.

I P H I S A.

I cannot blame the grief
Which I partake ; but hear me, hear the voicee.

O t

Of reason ; ev'ry tongue speaks of Orestes ;
They say, he lives, and the king's fears confirm it.
You saw Pammenes talking with this stranger
In secret, saw his ardent zeal to serve
And to attend him : think'st thou, our best friend,
Our comforter, the good old man, wou'd e'er
Associate with a murth'rer ? never, never,
He cou'd not be so base..

E L E C T R A.

He may be false,
Or weak ; old age is easily deceiv'd :
We are betray'd by all ; I know we are :
Did not the cruel stranger boast his deed ?
Did not Ægisthus yield me up a victim ?
Was not Electra made the price of guilt,
The murth'rer's reward ? Orestes calls me
To join him in the tomb : now then, my sister,
If e'er thou lov'dst Electra, pity her
In her last moments ; bloody they must be,
And terrible. Away ; inform thyself
Touching Pammenes ; see if the assassin
Be with the queen : she flatters all my foes ;
She heard unmov'd the murther of her son,
And seem'd, O gods ! a mother seem'd, to share
The guilty transport with her savage lord.

O that this sword cou'd reach him in her arms,
And pierce the traitor's heart ! I'll do't.

IPHIS.A.

No more :

Indeed you wrong her ; for the sight of him
Offends her : be not thus precipitate
And rash, Electra ; I will to Pammenes,
And talk with him : or I am much deceiv'd,
Or by their silence they but mean to hide
Some myst'ry from us : your imprudent warmth
(Yet who wou'd not forgive it in the wretched ?)
Perhaps alarms them, and they wou'd conceal
From you their purpose ; what it is, I know not :
Pammenes seems to shun you, let me go
And speak to him ; but do not, my Electra,
Hazard a deed thou wilt too late repent of.

S C E N E IV.

ELECTRA.

The subtle tyrants have gain'd o'er Pammenes ;
Old age is weak and fearful : what can faith
Or friendship do against the hand of pow'r ?
Henceforth Electra to herself alone
Shall trust her vengeance : 'tis enough : these hands,
Arm'd with despair, shall act with double vigour.

Arise

Arise ye furies, leave your dark abode
 For seats more guilty, and another hell,
 Open your dreary caverns, and receive
 Your victims ; bring your flaming torches here,
 Daughters of vengeance, arm yourselves and me ;
 Approach, with death and terror in your train ;
 Orestes, Agamemnon, and Electra
 Invoke your aid : and lo ! they come, I see
 Their glitt'ring swords, and unappall'd behold them ;
 They are not half so dreadful as Ægisthus :
 The murth'rer comes ; and see, they throng around
 him ;
 Hell points him out, and yields him to my vengeance.

S C E N E . V.

E L E C T R A, at the bottom of the stage.

O R E S T E S, on the other side at a distance from her.

O R E S T E S.

Where am I ? hither they directed me :
 O my dear country ! and thou, fatal spot
 That gave me birth, thou great but guilty race
 Of Tantalus, for ever shall thy blood
 Be wretched ? horror here on ev'ry side
 Surrounds me : wherefore am I punish'd thus ?
 What have I done ? why must Orestes suffer
 For his forefather's crimes ?

E L E C T R A.

ELECTRA.

[Advancing a little from the bottom of the stage.

What pow'r witholds me ?

I cannot lift my arm against him ; but
I will go on.

ORESTES.

Methought I heard a voice :

O my dear father, ever-honour'd shade,
Much injur'd Agamemnon, did'st thou groan ?

ELECTRA.

Just heav'n ! durst he pronounce that sacred name ?
And see he weeps : can sighs and penitence
Find entrance here ? but what is his remorse
To the dire horrors that Electra feels !

[She comes forward.

He is alone ; now strike — die, traitor — O
I cannot —

ORESTES.

Gods ! Electra, art thou here,
Furious and trembling ?

ELECTRA.

Sure thou art some god
Who thus unnerv'st me : — thou hast slain my brother ;
I wou'd have ta'en thy life for't, but the sword
Dropp'd from my hand ; thy genius hath prevail'd ;
I yield to thee, and must betray my brother.

ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Betray him, no ! O why am I restraint'd ? ——

ELECTRA.

At sight of thee my resolution dies,
 And all is chang'd : coud it be thou who fill'd
 My soul with terror ?

ORESTES.

O I wou'd repay

Thy precious tears with hazard of my life.

ELECTRA.

Methought I heard thee speak of Agamemnon.
 O gentle youth, deceive me not, but speak :
 For I had well nigh done a desperate deed ;
 O shew me all the guilt of it ! explain
 The myst'ry ; tell me who thou art.

ORESTES.

O fitter

Of dear Orestes, fly from me, avoid me.

ELECTRA.

But wherefore I speak.

ORESTES.

No more : — I am — take heed
 They see us not together.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

Gracious heav'n!

Thou fill'st my heart with terror and with joy.

ORESTES.

O if thou lov'st thy brother —

ELECTRA.

Love him! yes:

And O in thee I hear a father's voice,
 And see his features; nature hath unveil'd
 The myst'ry: O be kind and speak for her,
 Do not deny it; say thou art my brother:
 Thou art, I know thou art—my dear Orestes;
 How cou'd a sister seek thy precious life?

ORESTES.

[Embracing her.]

Heav'n threats in vain, and nature will prevail:
 Electra is more pow'rful than the gods.

ELECTRA.

The gods have giv'n a sister to thy vows,
 And dost thou fear their wrath?

ORESTES.

Their cruel orders

Wou'd have depriv'd me of my dear Electra,
 And may perhaps chastise a brother's weakness.

ELECTRA.

ELECTRA.

Thy weakness there was virtue ; O rejoice
 With me, Orestes ; wherefore woudst thou force me
 To that rash act ? it might have cost thee dear.

ORESTES.

I've broke my sacred promise.

ELECTRA.

'Twas thy duty.

ORESTES.

A secret trusted to me by the gods.

ELECTRA.

I drew it from thee ; I extorted it ;
 Mine be the guilt ; an oath more sacred far
 Binds me to vengeance : what hast thou to fear ?

ORESTES.

My destiny, the oracles, the blood
 From whence I sprung.

ELECTRA.

That blood henceforth shall flow
 In purer streams ; haste then, and join with me
 To scourge the guilty ; oracles and gods
 Are all propitious to our great design,
 And the same pow'r that fav'd will guide Orestes.

S C E N E

S C E N E VI.

ELECTRA, ORESTES, PYLADES, PAMMENES,

ELECTRA.

Rejoice with me, my friends, for I have found
 My dear Orestes.

PYLADES. [To Orestes.

Hast thou then reveal'd
 The dang'reous secret? Coud'st thou think—

ORESTES.

If heav'n
 Expects obedience, it must give us laws
 We can obey.

ELECTRA.

Can'st thou reproach him thus
 Only for making poor Electra happy?
 Woud'st thou adopt the cruel sentiments
 Of persecuting foes, and hide Orestes
 From my embraces? what unjust decree,
 What harsh commands—

PYLADES.

I meant to fayre him for thee,
 That he might live, and be thy great avenger.

PAMMENES.

Princes, thou know'st, in this detested place
 They watch thee nearly; ev'ry sigh is heard,
 And ev'ry motion carefully observ'd:

Those

Those private friends, whose humble state eludes
 The tyrants search, adore this noble youth,
 And wou'd have serv'd him ; ev'ry thing's prepar'd ;
 But thy imprudence now will hazard all.

ELECTRA.

Did not Ægisthus give me to a hand,
 Stain'd, as he thought, with my Orestes' blood ?

[To Orestes.]

Thou art my master ; I am bound to serve thee ;
 I will obey the tyrant ; his commands,
 For once, are welcome, and the prospect brightens
 On ev'ry side.

PAMMENES.

It may be clouded soon,
 Ægisthus is alarm'd, and we have cause
 To tremble ; if he but suspects us, death
 Must be our portion, therefore let us part.

PYLADES.

[To Pammenes.]

Hence, good Pammenes, bring our friends together,
 The hours are precious ; haste and finish soon
 Thy noble work ; 'tis time we shou'd appear,
 And—like ourselves.

SCENE

SCENE VII.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, ORESTES,
PYLADES; Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

Slaves, execute your office,
And bear these traitors to the dungeon.

ORESTES.

Once
There rul'd o'er Argos those who better knew
The rights of hospitality.

PYLADES.

Ægisthus,
What is our crime? Inform us, and at least
Respect this noble youth.

ÆGISTHUS.

Away with them;
Ye stand aghast, as if ye fear'd to touch
His sacred person: hence, I say, take heed
Ye disobey me not: guards, drag them off.

ELECTRA.

O stay, barbarian, stay; for heav'n itself
Pleads for their sacred lives—they tear them from me,
O gods!

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Electra, tremble for thyself,
Perfidious as thou art, and dread my wrath.

S C E N E VIII.

ELECTRA, CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

ELECTRA.

O hear me, if thou art a mother, hear;
Let me recall thy former tenderness,
Forgive my guilty rage, the sad effect
Of unexampled sorrows; to complain,
Is still, the mournful privilege of grief:
Pity these wretched strangers; heav'n perhaps,
Whose dreadful vengeance thou so long hast fear'd,
May for their sakes forgive thy past offences;
The pardon thou bestow'st on them may plead
For thee: O save 'em, save 'em.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Why shoud'st thou
Be thus solicitous? What int'rest prompts
Thy ardent zeal?

ELECTRA.

Thou see'st, the gods protect them,
Who sav'd them from the Ocean's boist'rous rage,
And brought them here: heav'n gives them to thy care,

And

And will require them at thy hands—to one,
 O if they knew'st him—but they both are wretched.
 Are we in Argos, or at Tauris, where
 The cruel priestess bids her altar's smoke
 With stranger's blood? What must I do to save them?
 Command, and I obey: to Plisthenes
 You'd have me wedded; I submit, tho' death
 Were far more welcome; lead me to his bed.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

You mean to mock us: know'st thou not, he's dead?

ELECTRA.

Just heav'n! and hath Ægisthus lost a son?

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I see the joy that sparkles in thy eyes;
 Thou'rt pleas'd to hear it.

ELECTRA.

No: I am too wretched
 To be delighted with another's woe:
 I pity the unhappy, nor wou'd shed
 The blood of innocence: O save the strangers!
 I ask no more.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Away: I understand thee,
 And know thee but too well; thou hast confirm'd

The king's suspicions, and reveal'd the secret:
One of these strangers is—Orestes.

ELECTRA.

Well,

Suppose it were; suppose that gracious heav'n,
In tender pity, had restor'd thy son——

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O dreadful moment! how am I to act?

ELECTRA.

Is it a doubt, and can't thou hesitate?
Thy son! O heav'n! think on his past misfortunes,
Think on his merits; but if still thy mind
Is doubtful, all is lost: farewell Orestes.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

I'm not in doubt; I am resolv'd; ev'n thou,
With all thy fury, can't not change the love,
The tenderness I bear him: I will guard,
Save, and protect him—he may punish me,
Perhaps he will; I tremble at his name;
No matter—I'm a mother still, and love
My children; thou may'ft yet preserve thy hate.

ELECTRA.

No: I will fall submissive at thy feet,
And thank thy bounty: now, indulgent heav'n,

Thy

Thy mercy shines superior to thy wrath ;
 For thou hast giv'n a mother to my vows,
 Chang'd her resentful heart, and sav'd Orestes.

END of the FOURTH ACT.

A C T V. S C E N E I.

ELECTRA.

I AM forbid to enter here ; oppres'd
 With fears, in vain I lift these hands to heav'n :
 Iphisa comes not ; but behold the gates
 Are open'd : ha ! she's here, I tremble.

S C E N E II.

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

ELECTRA.

Say,

My dear Iphisa, what have I to hope,
 Will Clytemnæstra dare to be a mother ?
 Has she the pow'r, has she the will to make us
 Some poor amends for all the cruel evils
 She has inflicted on us ? Cou'd she e'er —
 But she's a slave to guilt, and to Ægisthus :

I am prepar'd to hear the worst ; O speak,
Say, all is past, and we must die.

IPHISA.

I hope,
And yet I fear : Ægisthus hath receiv'd
Some dark suggestions, but is doubtful still,
Whether Orestes is his pris'ner here,
And Clytemnæstra never nam'd her son :
She seems to feel a mother's fondness for him,
And, pierc'd with anguish, trembles for his life :
She struggles with herself, and fears alike
To speak or to be silent ; strives to sooth
The tyrants rage, and save them from his vengeance :
But shou'd Orestes once be known, he dies.

ELECTRA.

O cruel thought ! perhaps when I implor'd
My barb'rous mother I destroy'd Orestes ;
Her grief will but enrage the fierce Ægisthus ;
Nature is ever fatal here : I dread
Her silence, and yet wou'd not have her speak ;
Danger's on ev'ry side : but say, Iphisa,
What hath Pammenes done ?

IPHISA.

His feeble age
Seems strengthen'd by misfortune, and our dangers

But breath new spirit o'er his ardent zeal
 To serve our cause ; he animates our friends
 With double vigor ; ev'n the servile throng,
 That cringe around the tyrant's throne, begin
 To murmur at the name of great Orestes :
 Vet'rans, who serv'd beneath the father, burn
 With honest ardor to support the son :
 Such pow'r have justice and the sacred laws
 O'er mortal minds, howe'er by vice corrupted.

ELECTRA.

O that Electra cou'd enflame their souls
 With glowing virtue, breath her own fierce spirit
 Into their timid hearts, and animate
 Their cold resentment ! wou'd I had but known,
 E'er he arriv'd on this detested shore,
 That my Orestes liv'd ! or that Patimenes
 Had further urg'd —

S C E N E III.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNESTRA, ELECTRA,
 IPHISA, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS.

Guards, seize that hoary traitor,
 And let him be confronted with those strangers
 Whom I have doom'd to death ; he is their friend,

And confident, th'accomplice in their crimes :
 How dreadful was the snare which they had laid !
 O, Clytemnæstra, 'tis the curs'd Orestes,
 It must be he ; do not deceive thyself,
 Do not defend him : O I see it all,
 It is too plain : alas ! this urn contains
 The ashes of my son : the murth'lers brought
 This fatal present to his weeping father.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Can't thou believe ——

ÆGISTHUS.

I can ; I must rely
 On the fworn hatred 'twixt th'unhappy children
 Of Atreus and Thyestes ; must believe
 The time, the place, the rage of fierce Electra,
 Iphisa's tears, your undeserv'd compassion,
 Your ill-tim'd pity for these base assassins ;
 Orestes lives, and I have lost my son ;
 But I have caught him in the toils ; whiche'er
 It be, for yet I know not, I'll be just,
 I'll sacrifice the murth'rer to my son,
 And to his mother.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Horrid sacrifice !

I must not see it

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

Horrible to thee!

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

O yes; already blood enough hath flow'd
 In this sad scene of slaughter: O 'tis time
 To end the woes of Pelops' hapless race:
 If after all it shou'd not be Orestes,
 Woud'st thou, on dark suspicion's vague report,
 Murther the innocent? and if it be
 Indeed my son, my lord, I must defend him,
 Must gain his pardon at thy hands, or perish.

ÆGISTHUS.

I cannot, dare not yield to thy request;
 For thy own sake I dare not; thy fond pity
 May be thy ruin; all that melts thy heart
 To soft compassion, sharpens mine to rage
 And fierce resentment: one of them I know
 Must be Orestes, therefore both shall die;
 I ought not ev'n to hesitate a moment:
 Guards, do your office.

IPHISA.

O, my lord, behold me.

Low at your feet; must all our hapless race
 Thus humbly bend, thus supplicate in vain?

Electra, kneel with me, embrace his knees,
Thy pride destroys us.

ELECTRA.

Can I stoop so low ?

Shall I bring foul disgrace on thee, my brother,
And ignominy, and shame ? it shocks my soul ;
But I will suffer all to save Orestes.

[Turning to *Ægisthus*.]

If thou wilt save him, here I promise thee,
(Not to forget my father's murther, that
I never can, but) in respectful silence
To pay thee homage, still to live with thee
A willing slave, let but my brother live.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thy brother dies, and thou shalt live a slave ;
My vengeance is complete : thy pride is humbled,
And sues in vain.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

Ægisthus, 'tis too much,
To trample thus on the unhappy race
Of him who was thy master once ; away,
Spite of thy rage, I will defend my son ;
Deaf as thou art to a fond sister's pray'rs,
A mother's may prevail : O think, my lord,
Think on thy happy state, above the reach
Of adverse fortune now, Orestes ne'er

Can hurt thee, and Electra bends submissive
Beneath thy pow'r, Iphisa at thy feet ;
Can nothing move thee ? I have gone too far
Already with thee in the paths of guilt,
And offer'd up a dreadful sacrifice.
Think'st thou I'll yield thee up my purest blood
To glut thy rage ? Am I for ever doom'd
To take a murth'rous husband to my arms ?
At Aulis one a lovely daughter flew,
The other threatens to destroy my son
Before my eyes, close to his father's tomb :
O rather let this fatal diadem,
Hateful to Greece, and to myself a load
Of mis'ry, fall with me, and be no more
Remember'd ! O Ægisthus, well thou know'st,
I lov'd thee, 'tis amongst my blackest crimes,
And stands the foremost ; but I love my children,
And will defend them ; 'gainst thy arm uprais'd
To shed their blood will lift my vengeful hand,
And blast thy purpose : tremble, for thou know'st me :
The bands are sacred that united us,
Thy int'rest is most dear to Clytemnestra :
Remember still, Orestes is my son,
And fear his mother.

ELECTRA.

You surpass my hopes.

Surely a heart like thine cou'd ne'er be guilty ;
Go on, my honour'd mother, and revenge
Your children, and your husband.

ÆGISTHUS.

Slave, thou fill'st
The measure of thy crimes : gods ! shall Ægisthus
With-hold his vengeance for a woman's cries,
For Agamemnon's widow, and her children ?
Unhappy queen ! say, whom dost thou accuse ?
Whom dost thou plead for ? hear me and obey.
Away with them to instant death.

S C E N E . IV.

ÆGISTHUS, CLYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA,
IPHISA, DYMAS.

DYMAS.

My lord ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou seem'st disorder'd : what has happen'd ? Speak.

DYMAS.

Orestes is discover'd.

IPHISA.

Ha ! where is he ?

C L Y T E M -

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

My son !

ELECTRA.

My brother ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Have you punish'd him

As he deserves ?

DYMAS.

My lord, as yet he lives.

ÆGISTHUS.

And wherefore were my orders disobey'd ?

DYMAS.

His friend and fellow-captive, Pylades,
 Pointed him out, and to the soldiers shew'd
 Great Agamemnon's son ; they seem'd much mov'd ;
 I dread the consequence.

ÆGISTHUS.

I must prevent it,

For they shall die : who dares not to revenge me
 Shall feel my justice : Dymas, follow me :
 Stay thou and guard his sisters ; I defy
 The blood of Agamemnon : from the father
 Of Plisthenes, and great Thyestes' son,
 What mortal, or what god, shall save Orestes ?

S C E N E

S C E N E V .

C LYTEMNÆSTRA, ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

Fear not, but follow him ; Electra, speak,
Exhort our friends, and animate their zeal.

ELECTRA.

(To Clytemnæstra.

O in the name of pow'ful nature, now
Complete thy noble work ; conduct us, fly —

C LYTEMNÆSTRA.

You must not hence, the guards will not permit it :
Stay here, my children, and rely on me,
On a fond mother, and a tender wife :
I will perform the double task, and take
Orestes and Ægisthus to my care.

S C E N E VI .

ELECTRA, IPHISA.

IPHISA.

Alas ! th' avenging god pursues us still ;
Though she defends Orestes, still Ægisthus
Is at her heart ; perhaps the tender cries
Of pity and remorse shall nought avail
Against the tyrant ; he is proud, revengeful,

Implacable,

Implacable, and furious ; who shall save
If he condemns ? we must submit, and die.

ELECTRA.

O that before my death I had not fall'n
So low as to intreat him, to bely
My honest heart, and supplicate the tyrant !
Despair and horror sink me to the tomb
With infamy and shame ; my vain endeavours
To save Orestes but urge on his fate.
Where are these boasted friends Pammenes talk'd of,
Who, with fell rancour, and determin'd hate,
Pursued Ægisthus ? Where those vengeful gods
Who hid Orestes from my sight, uprais'd
His righteaus arm, and promis'd to support him ?
Where are ye now, infernal goddesses,
Daughters of night, ye who so lately shook
Your dreadful torches here ? all nature once
United seem'd to guard and to protect us,
But all desert us now, all court Ægisthus,
And men and gods, and heay'n and hell betray me.

S C E N E VII.

ELECTRA, PYLADES, IPHISA.

ELECTRA.

What say'st thou, Pylades ? the deed is done ?

PYLADES.

PYLADES.

It is : Electra's free, and heav'n obey'd.

ELECTRA.

How ?

PYLADES.

Yes, Orestes reigns : he sent me hither.

IPHISA.

Just gods !

ELECTRA.

Orestes ! is it possible !

I faint, I die with joy.

PYLADES.

Orestes lives,

And has reveng'd the blood of innocence.

ELECTRA.

What wond'rous pow'r hath wrought this strange
event.

PYLADES.

His father's name, Electra's, and his own ;
 His valour, and his virtue ; our misfortunes,
 Justice, and pity ; and the pow'r that pleads
 In human hearts for wretchedness like thine.
 Pammenes, by the tyrant's order bound,
 Was led with us to death ; in weeping crowds
 The people follow'd, and deplored our fate :

I saw their rage was equal to their fears,
But the guards watch'd them closely : then Orestes
Cry'd, strike, ye slaves, and sacrifice the last
Of Argos' kings ; ye dare not : when he spoke,
On his fair front such native majesty
And royal lustre shone, we almost thought
Great Agamemnon's spirit from the tomb
Had ris'n, and came once more came to bless man-
kind.

I spoke, and friendship's happy voice prevail'd ;
The people rose, the soldiers stood aghast,
And dropp'd th' uplifted falchions from their hands ;
The croud encircled us, and desp'rate love,
With friendship join'd, fought nobly for Orestes ;
The joyful people bore him off in triumph :
Ægisthus flew to seize his destin'd prey,
And in the slave he meant to punish, found
A conqu'ror : pleas'd I saw his humbled pride ;
His friends deserted, and his guards betray'd him :
Th' insulting people triumph'd in his fall.
O glorious day ! O all discerning justice !
Ægisthus wears the chains that bound Orestes ;
The queen alone attends, protects, and saves him
From the mad croud, that press tumultuous on,
Big with revenge, and thirsting for his blood ;

Whilst Clytemnæstra holds him in her arms,
And shields him from their rage, implores Orestes
To save her husband : he respects her still,
Fulfils the duties of a son and brother :
Safe from the foe you will behold him soon
Triumphant here, a conqu'ror and a king.

IPHISA.

Let us away, to greet the lov'd Orestes,
And comfort our afflicted mother.

ELECTRA.

Gods !

What unexpected blis ! O Pylades,
Thou best of friends, thou kind protector, haste,
Let us begone.

PYLADES.

[To his attendants.

Take off those shameful bonds ;

[They take off her chains.

Fall from her hands, ye chains, for they were made
To wield a sceptre.

S C E N E V I I I .

ELECTRA, IPHISA, PYLADES, PAMMENES.

ELECTRA.

O Pammenes, where,

Where's my Orestes, my deliverer ?

Why comes he not ?

PAMMENES.

PAMMENES.

This is a dreadful moment,
 And full of terror, for his father's spirit
 Demands a sacrifice, and justice waits
 To pay it, so hath heav'n decreed: this tomb
 Must be the altar where the victim's blood
 Shall soon be shed; that sacred duty done,
 He will attend thee; but thou must not see
 A sight so terrible: thou know'st the laws
 Of Argos suffer not thy sceptreless hands
 To join with his e'er the appointed time.

IPHISA.

But say, Pammenes, what of Clytemnæstra,
 How acts she in this dreadful crisis?

PAMMENES.

Vainly
 She deprecates the wrath of fierce Orestes,
 And strives to save Ægisthus; kneels for pardon,
 And craves that boon she never will obtain:
 Meantime the furies, deaf to her intreaties,
 And thirsting for the cruel murth'rer's blood,
 Throng round Orestes, and demand his life.

IPHISA.

O may this day of terror be a day
 Of pardon and forgiveness; may it finish

The

The cruel woes of our unhappy race !
 Hark, Pylades, Electra, heard ye not
 A dreadful groan ?

ELECTRA.

My mother's sure.

PAMMENES.

'Tis she.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA. [Behind the scenes.
 O spare me !

IPHISA.

Heav'n !

CLYTEMNÆSTRA. [Behind the scenes.
 My son !

ELECTRA.

He kills Ægisthus.

O hear her not, Orestes, but go on,
 Revenge, revenge, dissolve the horrid tie,
 And sacrifice the murth'rer in her arms :
 Strike deep.

CLYTEMNÆSTRA.

My son ! O, thou hast slain thy mother.

PYLADES.

O cruel fate !

IPHISA.

O guilt !

ELECTRA.

O wretched brother !

Crimes punish crimes ; for ever be this day
 Lamented by us !

SCENE

S C E N E IX.

To them ORESTES.

ORESTES.

Open wide, thou earth,
And swallow me : O Clytemnæstra, Atreus,
And Tantalus, I come, I follow you
To Erebus, a part'ner in your crimes,
To share your tortures.

ELECTRA.

O what haft thou done ?

ORESTES.

She strove to save him, and I smote them both——
I can no more——

ELECTRA.

She fell then by thy hand !

O dreadful stroke ! and coud'st thou——

ORESTES.

"Twas not I ;

"Twas not Orestes ; some malignant pow'r
Guided my hand, the hateful instrument
Of heav'n's eternal wrath : Orestes lives
But to be wretched : banish'd from my country,
When my dear father fell, my mother slain,
And by my hand ; an exile from the world,

Bereft

Bereft of parents, country, fortune, friends,
Now must I wander : all is lost to me :
O thou bright orb, thou ever glorious sun,
Shocked at our crimes, and Atreus's horrid feast,
Thou didst withdraw thy beams, and yet thou shin'st
On me ! O wherefore in eternal night
Dost thou not bury all ? O tyrant gods,
Merciless pow'rs, who punish'd me for guilt
Yourselves commanded, O for what new crime
Am I reserv'd ? speak—ye pronounce the name
Of Tauris, there I'll seek the murth'rous priestess,
Who offers blood alone to th'angry gods,
To gods less cruel, less unjust than you.

ELECTRA.

Stay, and conjure th'elf justice and their hate.

PYLADES.

Where'er the gods may lead, thy Pylades
Shall follow still, and friendship triumph o'er
The woes of mortals, and the wrath of heav'n.

END of the FIFTH and last ACT.



THE
PRODIGAL.

A

COMEDY.

Represented October 10th, 1736.



T H E
E D I T O R ' s
P R E F A C E

To the Edition printed in 1737.

IT is pretty extraordinary, that this comedy shou'd never yet have made its appearance in print, as it is now almost two years since it was first play'd, and ran about thirty nights: as the author of it was not known, it has hitherto been attributed to several persons of the first character; but it was indisputably written by Mr. *de Voltaire*, though the stile of the *Henriade* and *Alzira* are so extremely different from the stile of this, that we cannot easily conceive them to be the product of the same pen.

In

In his name we have here presented it to the public, as the first comedy ever written in * verses consisting of five feet ; a novelty which may perhaps induce other authors to make use of this measure : it will at least be productive of variety on the French theatre, and whoever gives us new pleasures, has always a right to a favourable reception.

If comedy shou'd be an exact representation of manners, this piece has sufficient merit to recommend it : we see in the *Prodigal* a mixture of the serious and pleasant ; the comic, and the affecting : thus the life of man itself is always chequer'd, and sometimes even a single incident will produce all these contrasts. Nothing more common than a family, wherein the

* It is astonishing that it shou'd ever enter into the head of a Dramatic writer to put his comedies into rhyme ; but it is still more astonishing that the sensible and ingenious Voltaire shou'd adopt a custom so ridiculous : the confining his verses to five feet, has certainly nothing but the novelty to recommend it ; they are even perhaps more faulty than if they had fifteen, by the quicker return of the same sounds to our ear. What pleasure a French author, or a French audience, might take in them, we cannot pretend to determine ; but they are certainly very perplexing to a translator, who finds it extremely difficult to reduce poetic language, and high-flown metaphors, to easy and familiar dialogue, without departing too much from the original. The English reader will frequently, I am afraid, meet with a stiffness of style in this comedy, which, with all the pains I have taken, it was impossible to avoid : add to this, that the names of *Fierenfat*, *Life*, *Martha*, &c, sound but uncouthly to us ; and to change them, was a liberty which I thought a translator had no right to take.

father

father grumbles, the daughter, who is in love, whimpers, the son laughs at them both, and the relations take different parts as it happens to suit their inclinations; we often make a joke of that in one room, which we cry at in the next: nay, the same person has often laugh'd and cry'd at the same thing within a quarter of an hour.

A certain lady of fashion, being one day at the bedside of her daughter, who lay dangerously ill, with all the family about her, burst into a flood of tears, and cry'd out, *O my God, my God, restore me my dear daughter, and take all my other children*: a gentleman, who had marry'd one of her daughters, came up to her immediately, and taking her by the sleeve, *pray, madam, do you include your sons in law?* The arch dryness with which he spoke those words had such an effect on the afflicted lady, that she burst into a loud laugh, and went out; the company follow'd her, and laugh'd too; and the sick person, as soon as she heard the cause of their mirth, laugh'd more heartily than all the rest.

We don't mean to infer from this, that every comedy shou'd have some scenes of humour and drollery, and others serious and affecting: there are a great many good pieces where there is nothing but gaiety, others

intirely serious ; others where they are mix'd, and others where the tender and pathetic are carry'd so far as to produce tears. Neither of these different species shou'd be excluded from the stage ; and if I was to be ask'd, which is the best of them, I shou'd say, that which was best executed.

It wou'd perhaps be agreeable to the present taste for *reasoning*, and not unsuitable to this occasion, to examine here, what kind of pleasantry that is which makes us laugh in a comedy. The cause of laughter is one of those things which are easier felt than express'd : the admirable *Moliere*, *Regnard*, who is sometimes almost as admirable as *Moliere*, and the authors of several excellent *petites pieces*, have contented themselves with raising this pleasing sensation without explaining to us the reasons of it, or telling their secret.

I have observ'd, with regard to the stage, that violent peals of universal laughter seldom rise but from some *mistake*. *Mercury* taken for *Sofia* ; *Menchines* for his brother ; *Crispin* making his own will under the name of old master *Geronte* ; *Valere* talking to *Harpagon* of the beauty of his daughter, whilst *Harpagon* imagines he is talking of the beauty of his strong box ; *Pourceaugnat*, when they feel his pulse, and want to

make

make him pass for a madam: in a word, mistakes of this kind are generally the only things that excite laughter: Harlequin seldom raises a smile, except when he makes some blunder; and this accounts for the propriety of the name of *Balourd*, usually given to him.

There are a great many other species of the comic, and pleasantries, that cause a different sort of entertainment; but I never saw what we call laughing from the bottom of one's soul, either on the stage, or in company, except in cases nearly resembling those which I just now mention'd: there are several ridiculous characters which please, without causing that immoderate laughter of joy. *Trissotin* and *Vadius*, for example, are of this kind: the *Gamester*, and the *Grumbler* likewise, give us inexpressible pleasure, but never cause any bursts of laughter.

There are besides other characters of ridicule, that have in them a mixture of vice, which we love to see well painted, though they only give us a serious pleasure: a bad man will never makes us laugh, because laughter always arises from a gaiety of disposition, absolutely incompatible with contempt and indignation: it is true, indeed, we laugh at *Tartuffe*, but not at his hypocrisy; it is at the mistake of the good old gentleman, who takes him for a saint: the hypocrisy

once discover'd we laugh no longer, but feel very different impressions.

One might easily trace the spring of every other sentiment, and shew the cause of gaiety, curiosity, interest, emotion, and tears. It wou'd be a proper employment for some of our dramatic authors to lay open these secret springs, as they are the persons who put them in motion: but they are too busy in moving the passions, to find time for an examination into them: they know that one sentiment is worth a hundred definitions, and I am too much of their opinion to prefix a treatise of philosophy to a dramatic performance: I shall content myself with only insisting a little on the necessity we are under of having something new. If we had never brought any thing into the tragic scene but the Roman grandeur, it wou'd have grown at least very disgusting; and if our heroes had breath'd nothing but love and tenderness, we shou'd by this time have been heartily sick of them:

O imitatores servum pecus!

The works which we have seen since the times of *Corneille, Moliere, Racine, Quinault, Lulli, and le Brun*, seem to me all of them to have something new and

and original, which has sav'd them from contempt and oblivion: once more therefore I repeat it, every species is good, but that which tires us: we shou'd never therefore say, such a piece of music did not succeed, such a picture was not agreeable, such a play was damn'd, because it was of a new kind; but such or such a thing fail'd, because it was really good for nothing.

G 3 D R A M A T I S

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Old EUPHEMON.

Young EUPHEMON.

FIERENFAT, President of Cognac, second son of
Euphemon.

RONDON, a Citizen of Cognac.

LISE, Daughter of Rondon.

MARTHA, Chambermaid to Lise.

JASMIN, Valet to young Euphemon.

Scene, COGNAC.

THE
PRODIGAL.
A
COMEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

EUPHEMON, RONDON.

RONDON.

COME, come, cheer up, my old melancholy friend, how happy will it make me to see you merry again! and merry we will be: what a pleasure it is to think my daughter will revive your drooping family! But this same son of ours, this master Fierenfat, seems to me to behave strangely in the affair.

EUPHEMON.

How so!

G 4

RONDON.

RONDON.

Puff'd up with his Presidentship, he makes love by weight and measure: a young fellow putting on the grey-beard, and dictating to us like a Cato, is, in my opinion, a mighty ridiculous animal; I wou'd prefer a fool to a coxcomb at any time; in short, brother, he is too proud, and self-sufficient.

EUPHEMON.

And let me tell you, brother, you are a little too hasty.

RONDON.

I can't help it; 'tis my nature: I love truth, I love to hear it, and I love to speak it: I love now and then to reprove my son-in-law, to rate him for his coxcomial pedantic airs: to be sure, you acted like a wise father, to turn your eldest son out of doors; that gamester, that wild rake-helly profligate, to make room for this prudent younger brother; to place all your hopes on this promising youth, and buy a presidentship for him. O 'twas a wise act no doubt: but the moment he became Mr. President, by my troth, he was stuff'd up with vanity and impertinence: he goes like clock-work, walks and talks in time, and says he has a great deal more wit than I have; who, you know, brother, have a great deal more than you: he is —

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

Nay, nay, what a strange humour this is! must you always be ——

RONDON.

Well, well, no matter; what does it signify? all these faults are nothing when people are rich: he is, as I was going to say, covetous, and every covetous man is wise: O 'tis an excellent vice for a husband, a most delightful vice. Come, come, this very day he must be my son-in-law; Life shall be his: it only remains now, my dear sorrowful friend, that you make over all your goods and chattels, hereditary or acquir'd, present and future, to your son, only reserving to yourself a moderate income: let every thing be sign'd and seal'd as soon as possible, that this same young gentleman of your's may throw a good fortune into our laps, without which my daughter will most certainly look another way for a husband.

EUPHEMON.

I have promis'd you, Sir, and I will keep my word: yes, Fierenfat shall have every thing I am possess'd of: the sad remainder of my unhappy life shall glide away silently in some distant retreat: but I cannot help wishing that one, for whom I design my all, was less eager to enjoy it: I have seen the mad debauchery of

one son, and now behold with concern the soul of the other devoted to interest.

RONDON.

So much the better, man, so much the better.

EUPHEMON.

O my dear friend, I was born to be an unfortunate father.

RONDON.

Let me have none of your lamentations, your sighs, and your groans: what! do you want your eldest hopeful to come back, that prodigal spendthrift, to spoil all our pleasure at once, and drop in like a trouble-feast on the day of marriage?

EUPHEMON.

No: no.

RONDON.

Wou'd you have him come, and swear the house down?

EUPHEMON.

No.

RONDON.

Beat you, and run away with my daughter, with my dear Life; my Life, who —

EUPHEMON.

Long may that charming maid be preserv'd from such wicked fellows!

RONDON.

RONDON.

Do you want him to come again to plunder his father? Do you want to give him your estate?

EUPHEMON.

No: no: his brother shall have it all.

RONDON.

Ay! or my daughter will have none of him.

EUPHEMON.

To day he shall have Life, and all my fortune: his brother will have nothing of me but the anger of a father, whom he hath grievously injur'd: he has deserv'd my hatred; an unnatural boy!

RONDON.

Indeed you bore with him too long; the other at least has acted with discretion: but as for him, he was a profligate: my god, what a libertine! Don't you remember, ha! ha! that was a droll trick enough, when he robb'd you of your cloaths, horses, linnen, and moveables, to equip his little *Fourdain*, who left him the very next morning. Many a time have I laugh'd at that, I own.

EUPHEMON.

O! what pleasure can you find in repeating my misfortunes?

RONDON.

RONDON.

And then his staking twenty rouleau's upon an ace ;
 O dear ! O dear !

EUPHEMON.

Have done with this.

RONDON.

Don't you remember, when he was to have been
 broth'd to my little Life, in the face of the church,
 where he had hid himself, and upon whose account
 too ? —— the debauch'd rogue !

EUPHEMON.

Spare me the remembrance, good Rondon, of these
 unhappy circumstances, that only set his conduct in
 the worst light : am I not already unfortunate enough ?
 I left my own house, the place of my nativity, on
 purpose to remove as far as possible from my thoughts
 the memory of a misfortune, which, whenever it re-
 curs, distracts me. Your business led you to this place ;
 we have enter'd into a connection with and friendship
 for each other ; let me intreat you, Rondon, make the
 proper use of it. You are always repeating truths of
 some kind or other ; but let me tell you, truth is not
 always agreeable.

RONDON.

Well, well, it is agreed ; I say no more ; I ask
 pardon ; but sure the devil was in you, when you
 knew his violent temper, to make a soldier of him.

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

Again!

RONDON.

Forgive me, but really you ought —

EUPHEMON.

I know it: I know I ought to forget every thing but my youngest son, and his marriage: but tell me, sincerely, Rondon, think you he has been able to gain your daughter's heart?

RONDON.

O no doubt of it: my girl is a girl of honour, and will be obedient to her father: if I tell her she must fall in love, her little docile heart, which I can turn and wind just as I please, falls in love immediately, without any arguing about the matter: I know how to manage her, I warrant you.

EUPHEMON.

I have notwithstanding some doubts about her obedience in this affair, and am greatly mistaken if she answers your expectation: my eldest son had a place in her affections: I know how strong the first impressions of love are upon a tender heart; they are not worn out in a day; indeed, my friend, they are not.

RONDON.

RONDON.

Nonsense, nonsense.

EUPHEMON.

Say what you please, that wild fellow knew how to be agreeable.

RONDON.

Not he indeed: he was nobody: a poor creature: no, no; never you fear that: after his behaviour to you, I bade my daughter never to think of him any more; therefore set your heart at rest. When I say no, who shall dare to say, yes? But you shall see, here she comes.

SCENE II.

EUPHEMON, RONDON, LISE, MARTHA.

RONDON.

Come hither, my dear: this day, my dear, is a grand holiday for you, I'm sure; for this day I intend to give you a husband: now tell me, my little Lise, be he old or young, handsome or ugly, grave or gay, rich or poor, shall not you have the strongest desire to please him? have not you already an inclination for him? are not you in love with him?

LISE.

No, sir.

RONDON.

How, gipsy —

EUPHEMON.

O ho ! my liege : why your power is a little on the decline. What is become of your despotic authority !

RONDON.

Ha ! how is this ! what, after all I said to you, have you no passion for your future husband ? no inclination ? no —

LISE.

None in the least, sir.

RONDON.

Don't you know your duty obliges you to give him your whole heart ?

LISE.

No, sir ; I tell you, no. I know, sir, how far a heart, obedient to the dictates of virtue, is oblig'd by the solemn tie of marriage. I know, sir, it is a wife's duty to make herself as amiable as possible, and to endeavour to deserve a husband's tenderness ; to make amends by goodness for what she wants in beauty ; abroad to be discreet, and prudent ; at home, affable, and agreeable ; but, as for love, 'tis quite another thing : it will not endure slavery : inclination can never be forc'd, therefore never attempt it : to my husband I shall yield up every thing — but my heart, and that he must deserve before he can possess it : depend upon it, that heart will never be taught to love

by

by the command of a father; no, nor be argued into it by reason, nor frighten'd into it by a lawyer.

EUPHEMON.

In my opinion, the girl talks sensibly, and I approve the justice of her argument: my son, I hope, will endeavour to make himself worthy of a heart so noble, and so generous.

RONDON.

Hold your tongue, you old doting flatterer, you corrupter of youth: without your encouragement, the girl wou'd never have thought of prating to me in this ridiculous manner.

[To Life.

Hark, ye, miss, I have provided you a husband, perhaps he may have a little of the coxcomb, and take upon him rather too much; but it is my business to correct my son-in-law, and yours to take him, such as he is: to love one another as well as you can, and obey me in every thing, that's all you have to do: and now, brother, let us go sign and seal with my scrivener, who will give us a hundred words where four wou'd be sufficient: come, let us away, and rattle the old brawler: then will I come back, and scold my son, and your daughter, and yourself.

EUPHEMON.

Mighty well, sir: come along.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

My god! what an odd mixture it is! how strangely the old gentleman jumbles his ideas together!

LISE.

I am his daughter still; and his odd humours, after all, don't alter the goodness of his heart. Under this violence of passion, and air of resentment, he has still the soul of a father; nay, sometimes, even in the mid'st of his freaks, and whilst he is scolding me, he will take my advice: to be sure, when he finds fault with the husband he has provided for me, and tells me of the hazard I run in such a marriage, he is but too much in the right: but when, at the same time, he lays his commands on me to love him, then indeed he is most miserably wrong.

MARTHA.

How is it possible you shou'd ever love this Mons. Fierenfat? I'd sooner marry an old soldier, that swears, gets drunk, beats his wife, and yet loves her, than a coxcomb of the long robe, fond of nobody but himself;

who,

who, with a grave tone and pedantic air, talks to his wife as if he was examining her in a court of justice ; a peacock that's always looking at his own tail, who bridles under his band, and admires himself ; a wretch who has even more covetousness than pride, and makes love to you as he counts out his money.

LISE.

Thou hast painted him to the life ; but what can I do ? I must submit to this marriage : we are not the disposers of our own fate : my parents, my fortune, my age, all conspire to force me into the bonds of wedlock. This Fierenfat, in spite of my dislike of him, is the only man here who can be my husband : he is the son of my father's friend, and I can't possibly shake him off. Alas ! how few hearts are bestow'd according to our own inclinations ! I must yield : time and patience perhaps may conquer my disgust of him ; I may reconcile myself to the yoke, and come at last to pass over his faults as I do my own.

MARTHA.

Mighty well resolv'd indeed, my beautiful and discreet mistress : but your heart, I am afraid, is not quite so open — O if I dar'd — but you have forbade my ever mentioning —

LISE.

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LISE.

Whom?

MARTHA.

Euphemon — who, spite of all his vices, I know,
had once an int'rest in your heart ; who lov'd you.

LISE.

O never, never: mention no more a name which I
detest.

MARTHA. [Going off.

Well, well, I say no more about him.

LISE. [Pulling her back.

It is true, his youth did for a little time betray me
into a tenderness for him ; but was he form'd to make a
virtuous woman happy ?

MARTHA. [Going.

A dangerous fool indeed, madam.

LISE. [Pulling her back.

He met with too many corruptors to lead him astray,
unhappy youth ! he took his round of pleasures, but
knew little, I believe, of love.

MARTHA.

And yet there was a time when you seem'd to think
you had caught him in the toils.

LISE.

LISE.

If he had really lov'd, it might have reform'd him ; for, believe me, a real passion without disguise, is the best curb on vice ; and he who feels it, either is a worthy man, or soon will be so : but Euphemon despis'd his mistress, left love and tenderness for folly and debauchery. Those worthless villains, who pretended to be his friends, and drew him into the snare, after having exhausted all his mother's fortune, robb'd his unhappy father, and laid it upon him : to complete his misery, those vile seducers took him away from his father's protection, and snatch'd him from me ; hid him for ever from these eyes, which, bath'd in tears, still lament his vices and his charms. I think no more about him.

MARTHA.

His brother, it seems, succeeds to his fortunes, and is to marry you ; more's the pity, I say : t'other had a fine face, fair hair, a good leg, danc'd well, sung well, in short, was born for love.

LISE.

What are you talking of ?

MARTHA.

Even in the mid'st of all his freaks and follies, all his strange conduct, one might see a fund of honour in his thear.

LISE.

LISE.

There was ; he seem'd form'd for virtue.

MARTHA.

Don't think, madam, I mean to flatter him : but to do him justice, he was not mean, nor servile ; no railer, no sharper, no liar.

LISE.

No : but —

MARTHA.

Away : here comes his brother.

LISE.

Nay : we must stay now, it is too late to get off.

SCENE IV.

LISL, MARTHA, FIERENFAT the President.

FIERENFAT.

To be sure, madam, this augmentation of fortune must make the match more agreeable : increase of riches is increase of happiness, and, as I may say, the very soul of house-keeping : fortune, honour, and dignity, will not be wanting to the wife of Mons. Fierensat. At Cognac, madam, you will have the precedence of the first ladies of the Beau-monde : let me tell you, madam, no little satisfaction : you will hear them whispring as you go along, there she goes, madame la Presidente : really,

madam.

madam, when I reflect upon my rank, my riches, the privileges of my high office, and all the good qualities I possess, altogether with my right of eldership, which will be made over to me, I assure you, madam, I pay you no small compliment.

MARTHA.

Now, for my part, I am of another opinion: always to be talking of your quality, your rank, and your riches, is extremely ridiculous: a Midas and Narcissus at once, blown up with pride, and contracted with avarice; always looking at yourself and your money; a Petit-maitre with a band on; the most unnatural of all human creatures: a young coxcomb may pass off, but a young miser is—a monster.

FIERENFAT.

I believe, sweet-heart, it is not you whom I am to marry to day, but this lady; therefore, you will please, madam, to trouble your head no more about us: silence will become you best.

[Turning to Life.

You madam, I hope, who in an hour or two are to be my wife, will, I hope, favour me so far as, before night, to dismiss this blustering body-guard of yours, who makes use of a chamber-maid's privilege to give a loose

loose to her impertinence: but I wou'd have her know I am not a President for nothing, and may, perhaps, lock her up for her own good.

MARTHA.

[To Life.

Speak to him, madam, and defend me: if he locks me up, he may lock you up too, for aught I know.

LISE.

[Aside.

I wish he does not indeed.

MARTHA.

Speak to him then, and don't mutter.

LISE.

What can I say to him?

MARTHA.

Abuse him.

LISE.

No: I'll reason with him.

MARTHA.

That will never do, take my word for it; t'other's the better way.

SCENE VI.

RONDON to LISE, &c.

RONDON.

Upon my word, a pleasant affair this.

FIERENFAT.

What's the matter?

RONDON.

RONDON.

You shall hear. As I was tramping to your old gentleman with the parchments, I met him at the foot of this rock, talking with a traveller who had just lit out of a coach.

LISE.

A young traveller?

RONDON.

No: a toothless old fellow leaning on a crutch. I observ'd them rubbing their grey beards against each other for some time, shrugging up they humpbacks, and sighing most piteously; then they turn'd up the whites of their eyes, and fell o'sniveling together: at last Euphemon, with a crabbed face, told me, he had met with a great calamity, that at least he must have time to weep before he cou'd sign the articles, and at that time cou'd not talk to any body.

FIERENFAT.

O! I must go myself and comfort him: you know I can manage him as I please; besides, the affair is really my own concern; but as soon as he sees me with the contract in my hand, he will sign immediately. Time is precious, and my new right of eldership a matter of importance.

LISE.

There is no hurry, sir, you need not be so impatient.

RONDON.

RONDON.

But I say he shall be in a hurry: all this is your doing, madam.

LISE.

How, sir! mine!

RONDON.

Yes, your's, madam. All the crosses and disappointments that make families unhappy, come from undutiful daughters.

LISE.

What have I done, sir, to disoblige you?

RONDON.

What have you done! turn'd every thing topsy-turvy; put us all in confusion: but I'll let these two wife-acres lay their heads together a little, and then marry you off in spite of their teeth; in spite of yourself too, if you provoke me.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

LISE, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

I SEE this matrimony frightens you a little: this noise and bustle of preparation has something terrible in it.

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H

LISE.

LISE.

To say the truth, so it has ; and the more I think on the weight of this yoke, the more this heart of mine trembles at it. Marriage, in my opinion, is the greatest good, or the greatest evil ; there is no such thing as a medium in it : where hearts are united, where harmony of sentiment, taste and humour strengthen the bonds of nature, where love forms the tie, and honour gives a sanction to it, it is surely the happiest state which mortals can enjoy. What pleasure must it be to own our passion publickly, to bear the name of the dear beloved object of our wishes ! your house, your servants, your livery, every thing carrying with it some pleasing remembrance of the man we love ; and then to see our children, those dear pledges of mutual affection, that form, as it were, another union : O ! such a marriage is a heaven upon earth : but to make a vile contract, to sell our name, our fortune, and our liberty, and submit them to the will of an arbitrary tyrant, and be only his first slave, an upper servant in his family ; to be eternally jarring, or running away from one another, the day without joy, and the night without love ; to be always afraid of doing what we shou'd not do ; to give way to our own bad inclinations, or be continually opposing them ; to be under

the

the necessity either of deceiving an imperious husband, or dragging out life in a languid state of troublesome duty and obedience; to mutter, and fret, and pine away with grief and discontent; O such a marriage is the hell of this world.

MARTHA.

The young ladies of this age have certainly, they say, some little *dæmon*, some familiar, to inspire them! Why, what a deal of knowledge this girl has pick'd up in so short a time! the most expert, artful widow in Paris, that ever comforted herself with the thought of having bury'd three husbands, cou'd not have talk'd more learnedly on this head than my young mistress here; but we must have a little *Eclaircissement* with regard to this marriage, which it seems is so mighty disgusting: you don't approve of Mons. le President, pray how shou'd you like his brother? Come, unriddle the mystery to me. Has not the elder brother supplanted the younger? Come, who do you love, or who do you hate? Tell me the truth at once, and speak honestly.

LISE.

I know nothing about it: I cannot, dare not tell you the cause of my dislike. Why wou'd you search for a melancholy truth at the bottom of a heart already but too deeply afflicted? We can never see ourselves

in the water, whilst the tempest is howling round us: no; first let the storm be hush'd, the wind calm, and the surface smooth.

MARTHA.

Comparisons, madam, will never pass for argument: it is easy enough sometimes to see the bottom of a heart, it's clear enough: and if the passions are now and then a little tempestuous, a young lady of understanding can generally guess from what corner the wind blows that has rais'd the storm. She knows well enough —

LISE.

I tell you, I know nothing; and I am resolv'd to shut my eyes, and see nothing. — I wou'd not wish to know whether I am still weak enough to retain a passion for a wretch whom I ought to abhor, nor wou'd I increase my disgust for one man by regretting the charms of another. No: let the false Euphemon live happy, and content, if he can be so; but let him not be disinherited; never will I be so cruel and inhuman as to make myself his sister on purpose to ruin and destroy him. Now you know my heart, search into it no further, unless you mean to tear it in pieces.

SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, a SERVANT.

SERVANT.

Madam, the baroness of Croupillac waits below.

LISE.

Her visit astonishes me.

SERVANT.

She is just arriv'd from Angouleme, and comes to pay her respects to you.

LISE.

Upon what occasion?

MARTHA.

O upon your marriage, no doubt.

LISE.

The very subject I wou'd wish to avoid. Am I in a condition to listen to a heap of ridiculous compliments, a register of common-place cant, and hypocrisy, that tires one to death; where common sense is murther'd by the perpetual exercise of talking, without saying any thing? What a task have I to go through!

SCENE III.

LISE, Mad. CROUPILLAC, MARTHA.

MARTHA.

Here her ladyship comes.

H 3

LISE.

LISE.

Ay, I see her but too well.

MARTHA.

They say she wants vastly to be marry'd, is apt to be a little quarrelsome, and almost in her dotage.

LISE.

Some chairs here. Madam, you will pardon me, if—

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O Madam!

LISE.

Madam!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I, madam, must likewise beg—

LISE.

Pray be seated.

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Sitting down.]

Upon my word, madam, I am quite confounded, and wish, from the bottom of my soul, it was in my power to—

LISE.

Madam!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, madam, I heartily wish I cou'd steal your charms; it makes me weep to see you so handsome.

LISE.

LISE.

Pray, madam, be comforted.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

No, madam, that's impossible. I fee, my dear, you may have as may husbands as you please. I had one too, at least I thought so; only one, and that's a melancholy consideration; and trouble enough I had to get him too, and you are going to rob me of him. There is a time, madam; O dear! how soon that time comes about! when if a lover deserts us, we lose our all, and one is quite left alone: and let me tell you, madam, it is very cruel to take away all from one, that has little or nothing left.

LISE.

You must excuse me, madam, but I am really astonish'd both at your visit and your conversation: what accident pray has afflicted you so? whom have you lost, or whom have I robb'd you of?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

My dear child, there are a great many wrinkled old fools, who fancy that, by the help of paint and a few false teeth, they can stop the course of time and pleasure, and fix wandering love; but, to my sorrow, I am a

little wiser: I see too plainly that every thing is running away, and I can't bear it.

LISE.

I am sorry for it, madam, if it be so; but I can't possibly make you young again.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I know it; but I have still some hopes: perhaps to restore my false one to me, might, in some measure, give me fresh youth and beauty.

LISE.

What false one do you mean?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

My ungrateful, cruel husband, whom I have run after so long; and little worthy he is of all my care. The president, madam.

LISE.

The president!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, madam: when Croupillac was in her bloom, she wou'd not have talk'd to presidents; their persons, their manners, their every thing was my aversion: but as we grow old, we are not quite so difficult.

LISE.

LISE.

And so, madam —

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And so, madam, in short, you have reduced me to a state of misery and despair.

LISE.

I, madam? how? by what means?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I'll tell you. I liv'd, you must know, at Angouleme, and, as a widow, had the free disposal of my person: there, at that very time, was Fierenfat, a student, a president's 'prentice, you understand me: he ogled me for a long time, and took it into his head to be most villainously in love with me. Villainously, I say, most horrid and abominable; for what did he make love to? my money. I got some people to write to the old gentleman, who interested themselves too far in the affair, and talk'd to him in my name: he returned in answer, that he would — consider of it: so you see the thing was settled.

LISE.

O yes.

H 5

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For my part, I had no objection : his elder brother was at that time, so I was inform'd, engaged to you.

L I S E.

[Aside.]

Cruel remembrance!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

He was a foolish fellow, my dear ; but had then the honour to be in your good graces.

L I S E.

[Sighing.]

Ha ! ha !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

This silly fellow, my dear, as I was telling you, being quite out at elbows, kick'd out of doors by his father, and wandering about the wide world, dead, perhaps, by this time, (you seem concern'd) my college hero, my president, knowing extremely well, that your fortune was, upon the whole, much better than mine, has thought fit to laugh at my disappointment, and go in quest of your superior — portion. But do you think, madam, to run in this manner from brother to brother, and engrois a whole family to yourself? I do here most solemnly enter my protest against it : I forbid the banns : I'll venture my whole estate, my dowry, and every thing ; in short, the cause shall

be

be so managed, that you, his father, my children, all of us shall be dead, before ever it is put an end to.

LISE.

I assure you, madam, with the utmost sincerity, I am very sorry that my marriage should make you miserable: I am sure, however, you have no reason to be angry with me; but I find we may make others jealous without being happy ourselves: look no longer, madam, I beseech you, with an eye of envy on my condition; he is a husband I shall not quarrel with you for.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Not quarrel for him?

LISE.

No: I'll give him up to you with all my heart.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You have no taste then for his person? you don't love him?

LISE.

I see very few charms in matrimony, and none at all in a law suit; and so, madam—

S C E N E

SCENE IV.

M. de CROUPILLAC, LISE, RONDON.

RONDON.

So, so, daughter, here's fine work; protests, declarations, and law-suits, enough to makes one's hair stand an end. Ouns! shall Rondon be talk'd to thus? but I'll ferret them out, the impertinent rascals.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Must I suffer more indignities! Hear me, Mr. Rondon.

RONDON.

What wou'd you have, madam?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Your son-in-law, fir, is a false villain, a coxcomb of a new species; a gallant, and a miser; a widow-hunter, a fellow that loves nothing but money.

RONDON.

He's in the right of it.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

In my own house has he a thousand times vow'd eternal constancy to me.

RONDON.

RONDON.

Promises of that kind, madam, are very seldom kept.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And then to leave me so basely.

RONDON.

I believe I shou'd have done the same.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

But I shall talk to his father in a proper manner.

RONDON.

I'd rather you wou'd talk to him than to me.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

'Tis a wicked thing, so it is; and the whole sex will take my part, and cry out shame upon him.

RONDON.

They can't cry louder than yourself.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I'll make the world know how they should treat a baroness.

RONDON.

I'll tell you how: laugh at her.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

A husband, look ye, I must have; and I will take him, or his old father, or you.

RONDON.

Me?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, you.

RONDON.

I defy you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

We'll try it: I'll go to law with you.

RONDON.

Ridiculous.

S C E N E V.

RONDON, FIERENFAT, LISE.

RONDON.

[To Life.

Pray, madam, what's the reason you receive such visitors in my house? you are always bringing me into some scrape or other.

[To Fierenfat.

And you, sir, you Mr. King of Pedants, what non-sensical dæmon inspir'd you with the thought of courting a baroness, only to laugh at and abuse her? A pretty scheme indeed, with that flat face of your's, to

give

give yourself the airs of a flighty young coxcomb ; with that grave sorrowful countenance to play the gallant : it might have became the rake your brother, but for you—fy ! fy !

FIERENFAT.

My dear father-in-law, don't be misled : I never was desirous of this match ; I only promis'd her conditionally, and always reserved to myself the right of taking a richer wife, if I cou'd get one : the disinheriting my elder brother, and coming into immediate possession of his fortune, have given me pretensions to your daughter : come, come, money makes the best matches.

RONDON.

So it does, my boy ; there you're in the right.

LISE.

Now that right I take to be quite wrong.

RONDON.

Psha! psha! money does every thing, that's certain ; let us therefore settle the affair immediately : sixty good sacks full of French crowns will set every thing right, in spite of all the Croupillacs in the universe. How this Euphemon makes me wait ! I'm out of all patience ; but let us sign before he comes.

LISE.

LISE.

No, sir, there I enter my caveat: I will only submit on certain conditions.

RONDON.

Conditions! impertinence! you pretend to say—

LISE.

I say, sir, what I think: can we ever taste, can we enjoy that guilty happiness, which springs from another's misery? and you, Sir, [to Fierensfat] can you in your prosperity forget that you have a brother?

FIERENFAT.

A brother? I never saw him in my life: he was gone from home when I was at college, hard at my Cujatius and Bartole. I've heard indeed of his pranks since; and, if he ever comes back again, we know what we have to do, never fear that; we shall send him off to the gallies.

LISE.

A brotherly and a christian resolution! In the mean time you'll confiscate his estate; that, I suppose, is your intention: but I tell you, sir, I detest and abhor the project.

RONDON.

RONDON.

Heigh! heigh! very fine: but come, my dear, the contract is drawn, and the lawyer has taken care of all that.

FIERENFAT.

Our forefathers have determined concerning this matter; consult the written law: let me see, in Cujatius, chapter the fifth, sixth, and seventh, we read thus: ' Every debauch'd libertine that leaves his father's house, or pillages the same, shall, *ipso facto*, be dispossess'd of every thing, and disinherited as a bastard.'

LISE.

I know nothing about laws or precedents, nor have ever read Cujatius; but will venture to pronounce, that they are a set of vile unfeeling wretches, foes to common sense and without humanity, who say a brother shou'd let a brother perish: nature and honour have their rights to plead, that are more powerful than Cujatius and all your laws.

RONDON.

Come, come, let's have none of your codes, and your honour, and your nonsense; but do as I'd have you:

you: what's all this fuss about an elder brother? there shou'd be money.

L I S E.

There shou'd be virtue, sir: let him be punish'd; but leave him at least something to subsist on, the poor remains of an elder brother's right: in a word, sir, I must tell you, my hand shall never be purchased at the price of his ruin: blot out therefore that article in the contract which I abhor, and which wou'd be a disgrace to us all: if lucrative views induced you to draw it up thus, it is a shame and a dishonour to us, and therefore I desire it may be expunged.

FIERENFAT.

How very little women know of business!

RONDON.

What! you want to correct two attorneyes at law, and make a contract void: O lud! O lud!

L I S E.

Why not?

RONDON.

You'll never make a good housewife; you'll let every thing go to rack and ruin.

L I S E.

LISE.

At present, sir, I cannot boast my knowledge of the world, or of oeconomy; but I will maintain it, the love of money destroys more families than it supports; and if ever I have a house of my own, the foundation of it shall be laid on—justice.

RONDON.

She is light-headed; but let us humour her a little: come, give him a little matter, and the business will be over.

FIERENFAT.

Ay, ay, well—I give to my brother—ay, I give him—come along.

RONDON.

Not a single farthing.

SCENE VI.

EUPHEMON, RONDON, LISE, FIERENFAT.

RONDON.

O! here comes the old gentleman. Well, I have brought my daughter to reason; we want nothing now but your hand to the contract. Come, come, let's have no more delays, clear up, put on your j-

vial

vial countenance, your wedding looks, man ; for in nine months time, I'll lay my life, two thumping boys—come, come, let us laugh and sing, and cast away care: sign, my boy, sign.

EUPHEMON.

I can't, sir.

FIERENFAT.

You can't?

RONDON.

Ay, here's another now !

FIERENFAT.

For what reason, pray ?

RONDON.

What is all this madness? Are all the world turn'd
fools? Every body says, no. Why how is this?
what's the meaning of it?

EUPHEMON.

To sign the contract at a time like this, wou'd be
lying in the face of nature.

RONDON.

What! is my lady Croupillac at the bottom of all
this?

EUPHEMON

EUPHEMON.

No: she's a fool, and wants to break off the match for her own sake: 'tis not from her ridiculous noise that my uneasiness arises, I assure you.

RONDON.

Whence comes it then? Did that fellow out of the coach put it into your head? Are we indehted to him for all this?

EUPHEMON.

What he told me must at least retard our happy marriage, which we were so eager upon.

LISE.

What did he tell you, sir?

FIERENFAT.

Ay, sir, what news did he bring?

EUPHEMON.

News that shock'd me: at Bourdeaux this man saw my son, naked, friendless, and in prison, dying with hunger; shame and sickness leading him to the grave: sickness and misfortunes had blasted the flower of his youth; and an obstinate fever, that had poisoned his blood, seemed to threaten that his last hour was not

far

far off: when he saw him, he was then just expiring: alas! perhaps by this time he is no more.

RONDON.

Then his pension's pay'd.

LISE.

Dead?

RONDON.

Don't be frighten'd, child, what is it to you?

FIERENFAT.

Ha! the blood hath forsaken her cheeks; she looks pale as death.

RONDON.

The jade has a little too much sensibility about her, that's the truth of it: but as he's dead, I forgive thee.

FIERENFAT.

But after all, sir, do you mean—

EUPHEMON.

Don't be afraid; you shall have her; it is my desire you shou'd: but to chuse a day of mourning for a wedding-day, wou'd be highly unbecoming. How wou'd my griefs interrupt your mirth! how wou'd your chaplets fade when wetted with a father's tears! no, my son, you must put off your happiness, and give

give me one day to indulge my sorrow: joy so ill-timed as this wou'd be an affront to decency.

LISE.

No doubt it wou'd: for my part, I had much rather share with you in your affliction, than think of marriage.

FIERENFAT.

Nay, but, my dear father—

RONDON.

Why, you're an old fool: what! put off a wed-ding, that has been the Lord knows how long upon the anvil, for an ungrateful young dog, who has been a hundred times disinherited: a p—x on you and your whole family!

EUPHEMON.

At such a time a father must still be a father; his errors, his vices, and his crimes always made me unhappy; and it hurts me still more to think, that he is dead without ever repenting of them.

RONDON.

Well, well, we'll make that matter easy: ha! boy, let us give him some grand-sons to make him amends: come,

come, come, sign, and let's have a dance: what nonsense this is!

EUPHEMON.

But, sir—

RONDON.

But—Oons! this makes me mad: to be sorry for the luckiest accident that cou'd happen, ridiculous! Sorrow is good for nothing at the best; but to whimper and whine, because you have got rid of a burthen, intolerable absurdity! This eldest son, this scourge of your's, to my knowledge, two or three times had like to have broke your heart; sooner or later he wou'd have brought you to the grave: therefore prithee, man, take my advice, and make yourself easy; the loss of such a son is the greatest gain.

EUPHEMON.

True, my friend; but it is a gain that costs me more than you think: alas! I lament that he died, and I lament that ever he was born.

RONDON.

[To Fierenfat,

Away, follow the old gentleman, and be as expeditious as you can; the dead, you see, has got hold of the living; so take the contract, I'll not be haggled

gled with any longer ; take his hand, and make him sign. For you, madam, [*To Life*] we shall expect you to night ; every thing will go well, I warrant you.

LISE.

I'm in the utmost despair.

END of the SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

EUPHEMON the Son, JASMIN.

JASMIN.

I HAVE serv'd you, Sir, now two years, without knowing who or what you are : you were then my master ; permit me now to call you my friend : you are now, like myself, thrown upon the wide world, and poverty has put us on a level : you are no longer the man of pleasure, the gallant and gay Euphemon, treated and caref'd by the men, surrounded and courted by the women. Every fliver you had is gone to the devil ; and you have nothing now to do but to forget you was ever worth a shilling ; for surely

the most insupportable of all evils is the remembrance of happiness which we no longer enjoy: for my part, I was always plain Jasmin, and therefore the less to be pitied: born as I was to suffer, I suffer contentedly; to be in want of every thing is only natural to me; your old hat there, for instance, and coarse ragged waistcoat, was my usual garb; and you have great reason to be sorry that you had not always been as poor as myself.

EUPHEMON.

How shame and ignominy attend upon misfortune! how melancholy a consideration is it to reflect, that a servant shall have it in his power to humble me! and what's worse, I feel that he's in the right too; he endeavours to comfort me, after his manner; he keeps me company; and his heart, rough and unpolish'd as it is, is sensible, tender, and humane: born my equal, (for as a fellow creature so he was) he tries to support me under my affliction, and follows my unhappy fortune, whilst every friend I had, abandons me.

JASMIN.

Friends, did you say, sir? Pray, my good master, who are they? how are those people made whom they call friends?

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

You have seen them, Jasmin, coming into my house whenever they pleas'd, troubling me for ever with their importunate visits ; a crowd of parasites, who liv'd upon my bounty, complimented my fine taste, my elegance, my delicacy ; borrow'd my money, then prais'd me before my face, and stunn'd me with their ridiculous flattery.

JASMIN.

Ay, poor devil ! you did not hear them laughing at you as they went away, and making a joke of your foolish generosity.

EUPHEMON.

I believe it ; for in the beginning of my misfortunes, when I was arrested at Bourdeaux, not one of those, on whom I had lavished my all, ever came near me, or offer'd me his purse ; and when I got out sick and friendless, I apply'd to one of them in this poor ragged condition, and almost famish'd, for a little charitable assistance to lengthen out my wretched life, he turn'd away his unrelenting eye, pretended even to know nothing of me, and turn'd me out like a common beggar.

JASMIN.

Not one to comfort or support you?

EUPHEMON.

Not one.

JASMIN.

Such wretches! friends indeed!

EUPHEMON.

Men are made of iron.

JASMIN.

And women too.

EUPHEMON.

Alas! from them I expected more tenderness; but a thousand times met even with greater inhumanity: one of them in particular I well remember, who openly avowed her passion for me, and seemed to take a pride in obliging me; and yet in the very lodgings, which she had furnished at my expence, and with the money I had squandered upon her, did she procure every day new gallants, and treat them with my wine, whilst I was perishing with hunger in the street: in short, Jasmin, if it had not been for the old man, who pick'd me up by chance at Bourdeaux, and who, he said, knew me when I was a child, death had by this

this time put an end to my misfortunes: but know'st thou, Jasmin, whereabouts we are?

JASMIN.

Near Cognac, if I am not mistaken; where, they tell me, my old master Rondon lives.

EUPHEMON.

Rondon! the father of—who did you say?

JASMIN,

Rondon, a blunt odd fellow: I had the honour of belonging to his kitchen once; but being always of a roving disposition, chose to travel; and after that was an errand boy, a lacquey, a clerk, a foot-soldier, and a deserter; at length in Bourdeaux you took me into your service. Rondon perhaps may recollect me: who knows but in our adversity—

EUPHEMON.

How long is it since you left him?

JASMIN.

About fifteen years. He was a character; half pleasant, and half surly; but at the bottom a good honest fellow: he had a child, I remember, an only daughter, a perfect jewel; blue eyes, short nose, fresh complexion

plexion, vermillion lips ; and then for sense and understanding, quite a miracle. When I liv'd there, she was, let me see, about six or seven years old, by my troth a sweet flower, and by this time fit to be gather'd.

EUPHEMON.

O misery !

JASMIN.

But why shou'd I talk to you about her ? it can be of no service to you ; I see you are concern'd, and the tears trickle down your cheeks : my poor master !

EUPHEMON.

What unhappy fate cou'd guide me to this place !
O me !

JASMIN.

You seem in deep contemplation, and as if the sight of this place made you unhappy : you weep too.

EUPHEMON.

I have reason.

JASMIN.

Do you know Rondon ? Are you any way related to the family ?

EUPHEMON.

O ! let me alone, let me alone.

JASMIN.

JASMIN. [Embracing him.

For pity's sake, my dear master, my friend, tell me who you are.

EUPHEMON. [In tears.

I am—I am a poor unhappy wretch, a fool, a madman, a guilty abandon'd criminal, whom heaven shou'd punish, and earth detest: wou'd I were dead!

JASMIN.

No: we must live. What, die with famine whilst we can help ourselves! we have our hands at least, let us make use of them, and leave off complaining: look on those fellows yonder, who have no fortune but their industry, with their spades in their hands, turning up the garden; let us join them: come, work, man, and get your livelihood.

EUPHEMON.

Alas! those poor beings, mean as they are, and approaching nearer to animal than human nature, even they, taste more pleasure and satisfaction in their labours, than my false delicacy and idle follies cou'd ever afford me; they live, at least, free from trouble, and remorse, and enjoy health of body, and peace of mind.

SCENE. II.

M. de CROUILLAC, Young EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

M. de CROUILLAC.

What do I see? or do my eyes deceive me? the more I look on him, the more I think it must be he. [She looks steadfastly on him.] And yet sure it cannot be the same; it can never be that gallant Squire of Angoulême, that play'd so high, and seem'd to be lined with gold: it is he: [She comes forward.] but the other was rich and happy, handsome, and well-made; this fellow looks poor and ugly. Sickness will spoil the finest face, and poverty makes a still more dreadful alteration.

JASMIN.

What female apparition is this that haunts us with her malignant aspect?

EUPHEMON.

If I am not mistaken, I know her well enough; she has seen me in all my pomp and splendor: how dreadful it is to appear mean and destitute in the eyes of those who have seen us in affluence and prosperity! let us be gone.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Coming up to Euphemon.
What strange accident, my dear child, hath reduced thee to this pitiful plight?

EUPHEMON.

My own folly.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Why, what a figure dost thou make!

EUPHEMON.

Ay, madam, the consequence of having good friends; of being robb'd, and plunder'd.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Plunder'd? by whom? how? when? where?

JASMIN.

O, from mere goodness of heart: "our thieves were mighty honest creatures, persons that figur'd in the beau-monde, amiable triflers, gamesters, bottle-companions, agreeable story-tellers, men of wit, and women of beauty.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I understand you: you have squander'd away all you had in eating and drinking: but you will think this nothing when you come to know the distresses I

have undergone, and the losses I have suffer'd with regard to——matrimony.

EUPHEMON.

Your humble servant, madam.

M. de CROUPILLAC. [Stopping him.

Your servant indeed ! no, no, positively you shall stay, and hear my misfortunes ; you shall be sorry for me.

EUPHEMON.

Well, well, I am sorry for you ; good by to you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Nay, now I vow and swear you shall hear the whole story. One Mons. Fierenfat, a lawyer by profession, got acquainted with me at Angoulême, about [She runs after him.] the time when you beat the four bailiffs, and run away : this Mons. Fierenfat, you must know, lives not far from hence, with his father Euphemon.

EUPHEMON. [Coming back.

Euphemon !

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes.

EUPHEMON.

For heaven's sake, madam, that Euphemon mean you, so celebrated for his virtues, the honour of his race, cou'd he ——

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Yes, sir.

EUPHEMON.

And does he live here?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

He does.

EUPHEMON.

And may I ask you, madam, how is he? how does he?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Very well, I believe, sir: what the duce ails him?

EUPHEMON.

And pray, madam, what do they say —

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Of whom, sir?

EUPHEMON.

Of an eldest son he had formerly.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O, an ill-begotten rogue, a rake, a rattle-pate, an arrant fool, a madman, a fellow given up to every vice; hang'd, I suppose, by this time.

EUPHEMON.

Indeed, madam — but I am ashame'd of interrupting you in this manner.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

To proceed then: this Mons. Fierenfat, as I was telling you, his younger brother, made strong love to me, and was to have been marry'd to me.

EUPHEMON.

And is he so happy? have you got him?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

No: wou'd you think it, sir, this fool, puff'd up with the thoughts of stepping in to all his mad brother's fortune, growing rich, and wanting to be more so, breaks off this match, which would have been so honourable to him, and now wants to lay hold of the daughter of one Rondon, a vulgar cit, the cock of the village here.

EUPHEMON.

Going to marry her, say you?

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And here am I most dreadfully jealous of her.

EUPHEMON.

That beautiful creature.—Jasmin here was just now giving me a picture of her: wou'd she throw herself away—

JASMIN.

JASMIN. [Aside to Euphemon.

What are you about, sir? this husband is as good as another for her, I think: but my master's a strange man, every thing afflicts him.

EUPHEMON.

[Aside.

This is beyond all bearing.

[Aloud to M. de Croupillac.

My heart, madam, is deeply sensible of the injury you have receiv'd; this Life shou'd never be his, if I cou'd prevent it.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You take it rightly, sir; you lament my unhappy fate; the poor are always compassionate; you had not half the good-nature when you roll'd in money; but mind what I have to say, in this life we may always help one another.

JASMIN.

Help us then, dear madam, I beseech you.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

You must act for me in this affair.

EUPHEMON.

I, madam! how is it possible for me to serve you?

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

O, a thousand ways ! you shall take my cause in hand : another dress and a little finery will make you still look tolerably handsome : you have a polite insinuating address, and know how to wheedle a young girl : introduce yourself into the family, play the flatterer with Fierenfat, compliment him on his riches, his wit, his dress, every thing about him, get into his good graces, and whilst I enter my protest against the unlawful procedure, you will do all the rest ; by this means I shall at least gain time.

EUPHEMON. [Seeing his father at a distance.
What do I see ? O heaven !

[He runs off.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Hai ! hai ! the fellow's mad sure.

JASMIN.

He's afraid of you, ma'am, that's all.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

A blockhead ! here, you, stop, hark ye, hark ye.
I must follow him.

SCENE

SCENE III.

Old EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

EUPHEMON.

Even the imperfect glance I had of that poor wretch, whoever he is, has, I know not why, fill'd my heart with anguish and disquietude: he had a noble air, and a turn of features that, some how or other, affected me: alas! I never see a poor creature of that age, but the sad image of my unhappy son recurs to me; I have still a father's tenderness for him: but he is dead, or only lives with infamy to disgrace me: both my children make me miserable: one by his vice and debauchery is my eternal punishment, whilst the other abuses my indulgence, and knows but too well that he is the only support of my old age: life is a burthen to me, and I must soon sink beneath it. Who art thou, friend?

[Perceiving Jasmin, who bows to him.

JASMIN.

Honour'd sir, noble and generous Euphemon, don't you remember poor Jasmin, sir, who liv'd with Rondon.

EUPHEMON.

Ah, Jasmin, is it you? time alters our faces, as you see by mine: when you liv'd here I had a good

fresh

fresh complexion, was hearty, and well; but age comes on, my time is almost over: and so, Jasmin, you are come back to your own country at last?

JASMIN.

Yes, sir: I grew weary of such a fatiguing life, of rambling about like a wand'ring Jew, so I e'en came home. Happiness is a fugitive being, I am sure it has been so to me. The Devil took me out, I believe, led me a long walk, and now has brought me back again.

EUPHEMON.

Well, I may assist you perhaps, if you behave yourself well: but who was that other poor wretch you were talking with, he that ran off just now?

JASMIN.

A comrade of mine; a poor wretch, half-starv'd like myself, without a farthing; he's in search of employment as well as I.

EUPHEMON.

Perhaps I may find some for you both: is he sober, and sensible?

JASMIN.

He ought to be so: he has very good parts, I know; can write, and read, understands arithmetic, draws a little, knows music; he was very well brought up.

EUPHEMON.

EUPHEMON.

If so, I have a place ready for him: as for you, Jasmin, my son shall hire you; he is going to be marry'd, to-night perhaps: as his fortune is increas'd, he'll want more servants; and one of his is going away too, and you may step into his place: to-night I'll present you both; you shall see him at my neighbour Rondon's; I'll talk to him there about it; so fare thee well, Jasmin; in the mean time, here's something for you to drink.

SCENE IV.

JASMIN alone.

The good man! blessings on him! Cou'd I ever have thought in this vile age to have met with so good a heart? his air, his demeanor, his benevolent soul, form together a speaking picture of the integrity of former ages.

SCENE V.

Young EUPHEMON, JASMIN.

JASMIN. [Embracing him.

Well, I have got a place for you; we are both to serve Euphemon.

EUPHEMON.

Ay! Euphemon!

JASMIN.

JASMIN.

Yes, if you like it: you seem surpris'd: why are your eyes turn'd up in this manner, as if you were going to be exorcis'd? what is the meaning of those deep sighs, that will not let you speak?

EUPHEMON.

O, Jasmin, I can no longer contain myself; tenderness, pain, remorse, all press upon me.

JASMIN.

What! has my lady there said any thing to you? what has she told you?

EUPHEMON.

She told me nothing.

JASMIN.

What's the matter then?

EUPHEMON.

My heart will no longer suffer me to conceal it from you: in short, that Euphemon—

JASMIN.

Well, what of him?

EUPHEMON.

O, he is——my father.

JASMIN.

JASMIN.

Your father? sir?

EUPHEMON.

Yes, Jasmin: I am that eldest son, that criminal, that unfortunate, who has ruin'd his unhappy family. O, how my heart flutter'd at the sight of him, and offer'd up its humble prayers! O, with what joy cou'd I have fall'n down at his feet!

JASMIN.

Thou, Euphemon's son! forgive me, sir, forgive my rude familiarity.

EUPHEMON.

O, Jasmin, think'st thou a heart, oppres'd as mine is, can be offended?

JASMIN.

You are the son of a man whom all the world admires; a man of a million: to say the truth, the reputation of his son shews to no great advantage when placed near his father's.

EUPHEMON.

'Tis that which gives me most uneasiness. But tell me, what did my father say?

JASMIN.

JASMIN.

I told him, sir, we were two unfortunate youths, very poor, but well educated, and wou'd be glad to serve him: he lamented our fate, and consented to take us. This evening he will introduce you to his son, the president, who, it seems, is to marry Life; that fortunate brother, to whom my old master Rondon is to be father in-law.

EUPHEMON.

And now, Jasmin, I will unfold my heart to you: hear the history of my misfortunes, and think how wretched I must be, to draw upon myself, by a variety of follies, the just indignation of a beloved parent; to be hated, despis'd, disinherited; to feel all the horrors of beggary and want; to see my fortune given to my younger brother, and forc'd after all, in my state of ignominy, to serve the very man who has robb'd me of every thing: this is my fate, a fate I have but too well deserved. But wou'd you believe it, Jasmin, in the midst of all my calamities, dead as I am to pleasures, and dead to every hope, hated by the world, despis'd by all, and expecting nothing, I yet dare to be——jealous.

JASMIN.

Jealous! of whom?

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

Of my brother; of Life.

JASMIN.

So, you are in love with your sister! well, that's a stroke worthy of you, the only sin you had never yet committed.

EUPHEMON.

You are to know, Jasmin, (for I believe you had then left Rondon) that we were no sooner out of our infancy, than our parents promis'd us to each other: our hearts readily obey'd, and were united: the conformity of our ages, our taste, our manners, our situation, every thing conspir'd to strengthen the tye; like two young trees, we grew up together, and were to have join'd our branches: time, that heighten'd her charms, improv'd her tenderness, and love made her every day more lovely: the world at that blest time might have envied me; but I was young, foolish, and blind; link'd in with a set of wretches, who seduc'd my innocence; intoxicated with folly and extravagance, I made a merit of despising her passion for me, nay, even affronted her: O, I reflect on it with horror. The croud of vices, that rush'd in upon me, carry'd me away from my father and my friends; what was my fate after this I need not inform you.

Every

Every thing is gone; and heaven, which tore me from her, has left me nothing but a heart to punish me.

JASMIN.

If so it be, and you really love her still, notwithstanding all your distress, M. de Croupillac's advice was good, to insinuate yourself, if possible, into Rondon's family. Your purse is empty, and love perhaps may find means to fill it again.

EUPHEMON.

Cou'd I ever dare to look upon her, to come in her sight, after what I have done, and in this miserable condition? No. I must avoid a father and a mistress; I have abused the goodness of them both, and know not (but it is too late to repent) which shou'd hate me most.

SCENE VI.

Young EUPHEMON, FIERENFAT, JASMIN.

JASMIN.

O, here comes our wife president.

EUPHEMON.

Is it he? I never saw his face before; my brother, and my rival!

FIEREN-

FIERENFAT.

Come, come, this does not go amiss. I have pres'd, and rated the old gentleman in such a manner, that I believe we shall be able to finish the affair in spite of him. But where are these fellows who are to serve me?

JASMIN.

We are come, please your honour, to offer ourselves —

FIERENFAT.

Which of you two can read?

JASMIN.

He, sir,

FIERENFAT.

And write too, I suppose?

JASMIN.

O yes, sir, and cypher, and cast accounts.

FIERENFAT.

Ay, but he must know how to talk too.

JASMIN.

He's a little modest, sir, and but just recover'd from a fit of sickness.

FIEREN.

FIERENFAT.

He looks bold enough, I think, and as if he knew his own merit. Well, sir, what wages do you expect?

EUPHEMON.

None, sir.

JASMIN.

O, sir, we have a most heroic soul.

FIERENFAT.

Well, upon those conditions I take you into my service: come, I'll present you to my wife.

EUPHEMON.

Your wife, sir?

FIERENFAT.

Yes, I'm going to be marry'd.

EUPHEMON.

When, pray?

FIERENFAT.

To-night.

EUPHEMON.

O, heav'n! pray, sir, forgive me, but are you deeply in love with her, sir?

FIERENFAT.

Certainly.

EUPHEMON.

Indeed?

FIERENFAT.

Yes.

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

And are you belov'd?

FIERENFAT.

I hope so. A droll fellow, this! You seem extremely curious, Sir.

EUPHEMON.

[Aside.]

How I wish to contradict him, and punish him for his excess of happiness!

FIERENFAT.

[To Jasmin.]

What does he say?

JASMIN.

He says, he wishes with all his heart he was like you, form'd to please.

FIERENFAT.

The ambition of the coxcomb! but come, follow me: be diligent, sober, prudent, careful, clever, and respectful. What, ho! la Fleur, la Brie, you rascals, where are you all? follow me.

[He goes out.]

EUPHEMON.

Now cou'd I like to salute him with two good boxes on the ear, to make that lawyer's face of his twinge again.

JASMIN.

I find, my friend, you are not mended much.

EUPHEMON.

I'm sure it is time to be so; and I assure you, I intend to be wiser for the future: from all my errors I shall at least reap this advantage, To know how to suffer.

END of the THIRD ACT.

A C T IV. SCENE I.

M. de CROUPILLAC, Young EUPHERON, JASMIN.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

I HAVE taken care, my friend, by way of precaution, to bring two serjeants from Angoulême; have you perform'd your part as well, and done as I desir'd you? Shall you be able, think you, to put on an air of consequence, and sow a little diffension in the family? Have you flatter'd the old gentleman? Have you look'd forward a little?

EUPHEMON.

No.

EUPHE-

M. de COUPILLAC.

How?

EUPHEMON.

Believe me, madam, I long to throw myself at her feet.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Pray then make haste and do it; begin your attack as soon as possible, and restore my ungrateful seducer. I'll go to law for you, and you shall make love for me: cheer up, man, put on your best looks; assure that air of importance and self-sufficiency, which is sure to conquer every heart, which baffles wit, and triumphs over wisdom: to be happy in love, you must be bold; resume your wonted courage.

EUPHEMON.

O, I have lost it all.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

How so, man? what's the matter?

EUPHEMON.

I had courage enough when I was not in love; but at present —

JASMIN.

There may be other reasons why he shou'd be rather bashful; this Fierenfat, you must know, is our

lord and master, and has taken us both into his service.

M. D. CROUPILLAC.

So much the better; a lucky circumstance: to be a domestic in your mistress's family, let me tell you, is a singular happiness: make your advantage of it.

JASMIN.

Yonder's something pretty, and coming this way too, to take the air, I suppose: she seems to come out of Rondon's house.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

'Tis she: come, my dear lover, make haste, now's your time: pluck up your courage, and speak to her: what! fighing and trembling, and pretend to love her too? O, fy, fy!

EUPHEMON.

O, if you knew the situation of my heart, you wou'd not wonder at my trembling and confusion!

JASMIN. [Seeing Life at a distance,

Sweet creature! how beautiful she looks!

EUPHEMON.

'Tis she: O, heav'n! I die with love, with remorse, with jealousy, and despair.

M. de

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Adieu: I will endeavour to return the obligation.

EUPHEMON.

All I ask of you is, if possible, to put off this cruel marriage.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

That's what I shall immediately set about.

EUPHEMON.

Alas! I tremble.

JASMIN.

We must try to get her by herself; let us retire a little.

EUPHEMON.

I'll follow you: I scarce know what I have done, or what I am going to do. I shall never be able to face her.

SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, JASMIN at the farther end of the stage, and EUPHEMON behind him.

LISE.

In vain do I go in and out, backwards, and forwards, endeavouring, if possible, to hide myself from myself; in vain do I seek for solitude, and examine my own heart: alas! the more I look into it, the more am I convinc'd that happiness was never made

for me: If I do at any time enjoy a momentary comfort, it is from that old ridiculous creature Croupillac, and the thought of her preventing this detested match; but then all my apprehensions return, when Fierenfat and my father urge it upon me with repeated importunities: they have gain'd over the good Euphemon.

MAR THA.

In troth, the old man is too good-natur'd, and Fierenfat governs him most tyrannically.

LISE.

I pardon him, he's fond of an only child; his eldest, poor man, gave him a great deal of uneasiness, and now he relies intirely upon the other.

MAR THA.

But after all, madam, notwithstanding every thing that has been reported, it is not clear that the other is yet dead.

LISE.

Alas! if dead, I must lament; if living, I must hate him: cruel alternatives!

MAR THA.

The news of his danger, however, seem'd to have a powerful effect upon you.

LISE.

LISE.

One might be sorry for his misfortunes without loving him, you know.

MARTHA.

But one may as well be dead as not be lov'd: and so you are really to be marry'd to his brother?

LISE.

My dear child, I am distract at the thought of it: you have long known my indifference for Fierenfat; it is now chang'd to horror and detestation: marriage with him is a potion most dreadfully bitter, which, in my present desperate case, I must swallow much against my will, I assure you; tho' my hand, at the same time, rejects it with horror and indignation.

JASMIN. [Pulling Martha by the Sleeve.

Hark'ee, fair lady, will you give me leave to whisper a word or two in your ear?

MARTHA.

[To Jasmin.

Most willingly, Sir:

LISE.

[Aside,

O cruel fate! why did'st thou prolong a life, which an ungrateful guilty lover has made so truly miserable?

K 4

MARTHA

MARTHA.

[To Life.

One of the president's servants, madam, but just now hired to him: he says, he shou'd be glad to speak to you.

LISE.

Let him wait.

MARTHA.

[To Jasmin.

Friend, my lady desires you wou'd wait a little.

LISE.

Always teasing me thus! even when he is absent I can have no peace for him. O dear! how weary am I of this marriage already!

JASMIN.

[To Martha.

My dear girl, procure us this favour, if you can.

MARTHA.

[Coming back.

Madam, he says he must speak with you.

LISE.

So! I see I must go.

MARTHA.

There is a person, it seems, who is very desirous of seeing you; he must speak to you, he says, or die.

LISE.

LISE.

I find I must go in and hide myself.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA, Young EUPHEMON, leaning on JASMIN.

EUPHEMON.

I can neither walk nor speak ; my sight too fails me.

JASMIN.

Give me your hand ; we'll cross her as she comes.

EUPHEMON.

O ! I feel a deadly coldness at my heart [*to Lise*]
will you permit—

LISE. [Without looking at him.

What wou'd you, sir ?

EUPHEMON. [Throwing himself on his knees.
What wou'd I ? that death which I deserve.

LISE.

What do I see ? O heav'n !

MARTHA.

Amazing ! Euphemon ! good God, how chang'd !

EUPHEMON.

Chang'd indeed: yes, Life, you are reveng'd of me. Well may you wonder, for I am chang'd in every thing: no longer do you behold in me that madman, that false wretch, so fear'd and detested here; he who betray'd the cause of nature and of love: young and thoughtless as I was, I fell a prey to every passion, and adopted every vice from my loose companions: but O! the worst of all my crimes, which never can be blotted out, never atoned for, was my offending you: but here I swear, by thee, and by that virtue, which, tho' I have forsaken, I yet adore, I have found my error. Vice, tho' I admitted it, was a stranger to this heart, which is now no longer stain'd with those guilty blemishes that obscur'd its native lustre; that pure, that sacred passion, which is still reserv'd for you, hath refin'd it; that tender passion, and that alone, brought me hither, not to break off your new engagements, or oppose your happiness, that wou'd ill become a poor abandon'd wretch like me: but since the misfortunes, which I so well deserv'd, have brought me, even in the prime of life, to the brink of the grave, I cou'd not help seeking you, to be a witness of my last moments; and happy, thrice happy shall I be, if he, who was once destin'd to be

"your

your husband, at length shall die, and not be hated by you.

LISE.

I am scarce myself: can it be Euphemon? can it be you? O heav'n! in what a condition too, and what a time is this: wretch as thou art, what cruel injuries hast thou done to both of us!

EUPHEMON.

I know it: at sight of thee, every folly I have been guilty of appears doubly inexcusable: they were dreadful, and you know they were, that is some punishment, but not so much as I deserve.

LISE.

And is it true, unhappy man, that thou hast at last repented of thy follies; that your rebellious heart is at length subdued, and misfortune hath pointed out to you the road of virtue?

EUPHEMON.

Alas! what will it avail, that my eyes are open'd, when it is too late! In vain is that heart subdued, in vain is my return to virtue, since I have lost in you its best, its only valuable reward.

LISE

LISE.

Yet, answer me, Euphemon ; may I believe you have indeed gain'd this glorious victory ? consult your own breast, and do not again deceive me : can you yet be prudent and virtuous ?

EUPHEMON.

I am so ; for still my heart adores you.

LISE.

And dost thou still love, Euphemon ?

EUPHEMON.

Do I love ? by that I live, that alone has supported me. I have born every thing, even infamy itself ; and a thousand times I wou'd have put an end to my wretched life, but that still I lov'd it, because it belong'd to you : yes, to you I owe my present sentiments, my being, and that new life which now dawns upon me : to you I owe the return of my reason : with love like mine, wou'd to heav'n I may be able to preserve it ! O do not hide from me that charming face : look at me : see how chang'd I am : see the cruel effect of care and sorrow : the roses of youth are wither'd by remorse and misery : there was a time when Euphemon wou'd not thus have affrighted you : do but look on me, 'tis all I ask.

LISE.

LISE.

If I see the thinking, the reform'd, the constant
Euphemon, it is enough: in my eyes he is but too ami-
able.

EUPHEMON.

What says my Life? gracious heav'n! she weeps.

LISE.

[To Martha.

O support me, my senses fail. Can I ever be the wife
of Euphemon's brother? But tell me,

[Turning to Euphemon.

Have you yet seen your father?

EUPHEMON.

O! I blush to appear before that good old man,
whom I have so dishonour'd: hated as I am, and
banish'd from his presence, I love and reverence, but
dare not look upon him.

LISE.

What then is your design?

EUPHEMON.

If heav'n shou'd graciously prolong my days, if you
must be my brother's happy lot, I propose to change
my name and profession, serve as a soldier, and seek for
death in the field of honour; perhaps success in arms may
acquire me some glory, and even you may hereafter shed

a tear over the unhappy Euphemon. My honour at least will never suffer by the employment ; Rose and Fabert set out as I shall do.

LISE.

'Tis a noble resolution ; and the heart that was capable of making it must be above guilt and meanness : sentiments like these affect me much more even than the tears you shed at my feet. No, Euphemon, if I am left at liberty to dispose of myself, and can possibly avoid the hateful match propos'd for me, if it is in my power to determine your fate, you shall not go so far to change your condition.

EUPHEMON.

O heav'n ! and does thy generous heart melt at my misfortunes ?

LISE.

They affected me most deeply ; but your repentance hath secured me.

EUPHEMON.

And will those dear eyes, that look'd on me so long with indignation, will they soften into love and tenderness ? O thou hast reviv'd a flame in the breast of Euphemon, which his follies had almost extinguish'd. Fond as my brother is of riches, tho' my father has giv'n him all that inheritance which nature had design'd

sign'd for me, he still must envy my happiness. I am dear to you ; he alone, and not Euphemon, is disinherited. O I shall die with joy.

MARTHA.

Deuce on him, here he comes.

LISE.

Be upon your guard, Euphemon ; keep in those struggling sighs, and dissemble.

EUPHEMON.

Why shou'd I, if you love me ?

LISE.

Consider my relations, consider your own father. Your brother saw us together, saw you at my feet; and all that we can now do is, not to let him know who you are.

MARTHA.

I can't help laughing, to think what a passion his gravity will be in.

S C E N E IV.

LISE, YOUNG EUPHEMON, MARTHA, JASMIN,
FIERENFAT at the further end of the stage, Euphemon turning his back to him.

FIERENFAT.

Either some devil has impair'd these eyes of mine ; or, if I see clear, I most certainly beheld — O yes — it is so — it's all over with me.

Coming

[Coming forwards towards Euphemon.]

O it is you, sir, is it? traitor, rascal, forger.

EUPHEMON.

[Enrag'd.]

I, I cou'd —

JASMIN. [Placing himself between them.]

Sir, sir, this — this is an affair of importance that was going forward, and you interrupt it, sir; an affair of love, sir, tenderness, respect, gratitude, and virtue — for my part I'm distract'd when I think of it.

FIERENFAT.

An affair of virtue! O yes, and kissing her hand too! call you that virtue? rascal, slave.

EUPHEMON.

O Jasmin, if I'd ar'd —

FIERENFAT.

No: this is a gallant indeed with a witness: had he been a gentleman, but a servant, a beggar — If I was to sue him in a court of justice, 'twou'd be only so much money flung away.

LISE.

[To Euphemon.]

Be calm; if you have any regard for me, I beg you will.

FIERENFAT.

The traitor! I'll have you hang'd, you dog.

You laugh, mistress.

[To Martha.]

MARTHA.

MARTHA.

I do, to be sure, sir.

FIERENFAT.

And why do you? what do you laugh at?

MARTHA.

Lord, sir, 'tis such a comical affair —

LISE.

You don't know, madam the danger you are in: you little think, my good friend, what the law inflicts on such delinquents as you, and how often you may be —

MARTHA.

Pardon me, sir, I know it mighty well.

FIERENFAT.

[To LISE.]

You, madam, seem to be deaf to all this, faithless woman! with that air of innocence too, to play me such a trick: your inconstancy is a little premature on our very wedding day, and just before we are marry'd: 'tis a wonderful mark of your chastity.

LISE.

Don't be in a passion, sir, nor lightly condemn innocence on bare appearances only.

FIERENFAT.

Innocence indeed!

LISE.

LISE.

Yes sir : when you know my sentiments, you will esteem me for them.

FIERENFAT,

You go an excellent way to gain esteem.

EUPHEMON.

This is too much.

LISE.

[To Euphemon,

What madness ! for heav'ns sake be calm, restrain—

EUPHEMON.

No : I will never suffer him to cast reproach on you.

FIERENFAT.

Do you know, madam, that you lose your jointure, your estate, your portion, every thing, as soon as —

EUPHEMON. [In a passion, and putting his hand on his sword.

Do you know, sir, how to hold your tongue ?

LISE.

O forbear.

EUPHEMON.

Come, come, Mr. President, lay aside your assuming airs, be a little less fierce, and haughty ; a little less of the judge, if you please : this lady has not yet the honour to be your wife, nor is she even your mistress, sir : what right have you then to complain ? your claim is void : you shou'd have known how to please,

before

before you had a right to be angry : such charms were never made for you, and therefore jealousy fits but ill upon you. You see she's kind, and forgives my warmth ; it will become you, sir, to follow her example.

FIERENFAT. [In a posture of defence.

I'll bear no more : where are my servants ? help here.

EUPHEMON.

How's this !

FIERENFAT.

Fetch me a constable here.

LISE; [To Euphemon.

Retire, I beseech you.

FIERENFAT.

I'll make you know, sir, the respect that's due to my rank and profession.

EUPHEMON.

Observe, sir, what you owe to this lady : as to myself, however things may now appear, the respect perhaps is due to me.

FIERENFAT.

You, sir, you ?

EUPHEMON.

Yes, sir, me, me.

FIERENFAT.

FIERENFAT.

This is a pure impudent fellow : some lover, I suppose, in the disguise of a servant. Who are you, sir ? answer me.

EUPHEMON.

I know not who I am, nor what will be my fate : my rank, condition, fortune, happiness, my very being, all depends on her heart, her kind looks, and her propitious bounty.

FIERENFAT.

They may soon depend upon a court of justice, that I assure you. I'll go this instant, prepare my records, and hasten to sign the instrument. Begone, ungrateful woman, and dread my resentment ; I'll bring your relations, and your father ; then your innocence will appear in its proper light, and they will esteem you accordingly.

SCENE V.

LISE, YOUNG EUPHEMON, MARTHA.

LISE.

For heavn's sake, conceal yourself ; let us go in immediately ; I tremble at the consequence of this. If your father shou'd find out it was you, nothing will appease him : he will conclude that some new extravagance brought you back here on purpose to insult him,

him, and to sow division between our families ; and then you will be confin'd perhaps, even without being so much as heard in your own defence.

MARTHA.

Let me conceal him, and I'll warrant they shan't easily find him out.

LISE.

Come, come, you must away ; I must endeavour to reconcile your father : the return of nature shall, if possible, be the work of love : you must be conceal'd a while — take you care [*To Martha.*] he does not appear : begone immediately.

S C E N E VI.

RONDON, LISE.

RONDON.

Well, my Life, how is it ? I was in search of you and your husband.

LISE.

[Aside.]

Thank God ! he is not so yet.

RONDON.

Where are you going ?

LISE.

Decency, sir, at present obliges me to avoid him.

[She goes out.]

RONDON.

216 THE PRODIGAL.
RONDON.

This president is a dangerous man, I find: now shou'd I like to be incog in some place close to 'em, only to see how two lovers look when they are just going to be marry'd.

S C E N E. VII.

FIERENFAT, RONDON, Constables, &c.

FIERENFAT.

Where are they, where are they? ha! gone; the subtle villains have escap'd me: where have the rascals hid themselves?

RONDON.

Your reverence seems out of breath? what are you in such a hurry about? who are you hunting after? what have they done to you?

FIERENFAT.

Made a cuckold of me, that's all.

RONDON.

Ha! ha! a cuckold! ha! how! what is all this?

FIERENFAT.

Yes, yes, my wife: heav'n preserve me from ever giving her that name! Yes, sir, a cuckold I am, in spite of all the laws in the kingdom.

RONDON.

My son-in-law!

FIERENFAT.

FIERENFAT.

Yes, my father-in-law, 'tis but too true.

RONDON.

Well, but the affair —

FIERENFAT.

Is as clear as possible.

RONDON.

You try my patience too far.

FIERENFAT.

I'm sure they have mine.

RONDON.

If I cou'd believe —

FIERENFAT.

You may believe it all, sir, I assure you.

RONDON.

But the more I hear, the less I understand.

FIERENFAT.

And yet it's very easy to comprehend.

RONDON.

If I were once conyinc'd of it, the world shou'd be a witness of my resentment, I wou'd strangle her with my own hands.

FIERENFAT.

FIERENFAT.

Strangle her then by all means, for the thing is fairly prov'd.

RONDON.

Something no doubt is wrong, by my finding her here in that condition; she hung down her head, and cou'd scarce speak to me; seem'd frighten'd, and embarrass'd too. Come, my son, let us in, and surprise her. This is a case of honour, and where that is concern'd, Rondon listens no longer to reason. Away.

END of the FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

LISE, MARTHA.

LISE.

WHAT a desperate situation is mine! scarce can I believe myself safe, even with you. Think what it must be for a soul so pure, so delicate, as mine, to suffer even for a moment such injurious suspicions: Euphemon, thou dear but fatal lover, thou wert born but to afflict me; thy absence was worse than death to me, and now thy return exposes me to infamy: [turning to Martha.] for heav'n's sake, take care of him, for they are making the strictest enquiry.

MARTHA.

MARTHA.

O never fear; I shall put 'em to their trumps, I warrant you: I defy all their search-warrants: I have some certain little cunning holes in my cabinet which these ferrets can never get at; there, madam, your lover lies snug, safely conceal'd from the inquisitive eyes of long-rob'd pedants. I have led the hounds a pretty good chace, and now the whole pack is at fault.

SCENE II.

LISE, MARTHA, JASMIN.

LISE.

Well, Jasmin, how stand our affairs?

JASMIN.

O I have pass'd my examination most gloriously, gone through it like an old offender, grown grey in the profession, and answer'd every question without fear or trembling. One of them drawl'd out his words with all the solemnity of a paedagogue; another put on a haughty air, and wou'd have brow-beated me; a third, in a pretty silver tone, cry'd out, child, tell us the truth: whilst I, with most laconic brevity, and unalterable firmness, fairly routed the whole group of pedants.

LISE.

They know nothing then.

COL. III.

L

JASMIN.

JASMIN.

Nothing: to morrow perhaps they may know all: time, you know, brings every thing to light.

LISE.

I hope at least Fierensfat will not have time to prejudice his father against me: I have a thousand fears about it: I tremble for him; and for my own honour: in love alone I have plac'd my hopes, that will assist me —

MARTHA.

For my part, I'm in a sad quandary about it, and wish ev'ry thing mayn't go wrong: consider, madam, we have against us two old fathers, and a president, besides scolds, and prudes innumerable: if you knew what haughty airs they give themselves, what a supercilious sneer, and severe tone, their proud virtue puts on upon this occasion, with what insolent acrimony they have persecuted your innocence, believe me, madam, their clamours, with their affected zeal, and most religious fury, wou'd raise your laughter, perhaps even make you tremble.

JASMIN.

I have travell'd, madam, and seen noise, and bustle enough, but never before was I witness to such a hubbub: the whole house is turn'd topsy-turvy: they

are all knaves, fools, or madmen ; whispering lies against you, and adding one untruth to another ; telling the story a hundred different ways : the poor fiddles are sent back without receiving a farthing, or a drop of drink : six tables prepar'd for the wedding feast, full of the finest delicacies, overset in the confusion : the people run backwards and forwards ; the footmen drink and laugh ; Rondon swears, and Fierensat is employ'd in writing the case out.

L I S E.

And what does the worthy father of Euphemon do amid'st all this bustle ?

M A R T H A.

O, madam, in his dejected aspect we may read the sorrows of afflicted virtue : he lifts up his eyes to heaven, and cannot bring himself to believe that you have stain'd the honour of your spotless youth with so black a crime : he defends you to your friends by the strongest arguments : and when at length he is stagger'd by the proofs they bring against you, he sighs, and says, if you are guilty, he will never again depend on any mortal breathing.

L I S E.

The good old man, how his tenderness affects me !

M A R T H A.

Here comes another, of a different kind, master Rondon ; let us avoid him, madam.

L 2

L I S E.

LISE.

By no means ; my heart is innocent, and shou'd be
afraid of nothing.

JASMIN.

But I am, I assure you.

SCENE III.

LISE, MARTHA, RONDON.

RONDON.

O thou subtle gipsy, thou forward, thou unnatural
girl ! O Life, Life. But come, madam, I must know
the bottom of this vile proceeding : how long have
you been acquainted with this robber, this pirate ?
Tell me his name, his rank, his profession ; how got
he into your heart ? Whence comes he, and where is
he ? Answer me, madam, answer me. You contemn
me, madam, and laugh at my resentment : are not
you ashame'd ?

LISE.

No, sir.

RONDON.

Always no, no, to me : am I never to hear any
thing but no ? It increases my suspicion : when I am
injur'd, I expect at least to be treated with respect.
I will be fear'd, madam, and obey'd too.

LISE.

LISE.

And so you shall, sir. I will discover every thing to you.

RONDON.

Well, that's saying something however: when I begin to threaten, people will mind me a little, and —

LISE.

I have only one favour to beg of you — that, before I say any thing to you, Euphemon will be so obliging as to let me speak a few words to him.

RONDON.

Euphemon! why, what has he to do with it? I think I am the properest person to be spoke to.

LISE.

My dear father, I have a secret to entrust to him: let me beg you, for the sake of your own honour, to send him to me: permit me — but I can tell you no more.

RONDON.

I must e'en yield to her request; she wants to explain herself to my good old friend, and I think I may safely trust her alone with him; and then to a nunnery with the little husscy immediately.

SCENE. IV.

LISE, MARTHA.

LISE.

O that I may be able to melt the good Euphemon !
 How my heart flutters and leaps within me ! my life
 or death depends on this important moment. He
 comes. Hark'ee, Martha.

[Whispers her.]

MARTHA.

I'll take care, madam.

SCENE V.

Old EUPHEMON, LISE.

LISE.

A chair here—pray, sir, be seated. Oh ! [sighs.]
 permit me, sir, on my knees ——

EUPHEMON. [Raising her up.]

You mean to affront me, madam.

LISE.

Far from it, sir ; my heart esteems and reveres
 you ; I have ever look'd on you as a father.

EUPHEMON.

Are you my daughter ?

L I S E.

LISE.

Yes, sir. I flatter myself I have not been unworthy of that name.

EUPHEMON.

After the unhappy affair, madam, that has broke off our connection, I must own —

LISE.

Be you my judge, sir, and look into my heart; that judge, I doubt not, will one day be my protector: but hear me, sir, I will speak my own sentiments, perhaps they may be yours also.

[She takes a chair and sits by him.

And now, sir, tell me; if your heart had for a long time been bound by the purest and most tender regard to an object, whose early years gave the fairest promise of all that is amiable, who every day advanc'd in beauty, merit, and accomplishments; if, after all, his easy and deluded youth gave way to inclination, and sacrificed duty, friendship, every thing, to unbridled licentiousness.

EUPHEMON.

Well, madam.

LISE.

If fatal experience shou'd teach him what false happiness he had so long pursued, shou'd teach him that

the vain objects of his search sprang but from error, and were follow'd by remorse; if at length, ashame'd of his follies, his reason, instructed by misfortune, shou'd again light up his virtues, and give him a new heart; if, restor'd to his natural form, he shou'd become faithful, just, and honest, wou'd you, sir, cou'd you then shut up that heart which once was open to receive him?

EUPHEMON.

What am I to conclude from this picture, or what has it to do with our affair, and the injury I have receiv'd from your conduct? The wretch who was seen at your feet is a young man, utterly unknown to every body here: the widow says indeed she remembers him six months at Angoulême: another tells me he is a hardy profligate, with a head full of dark intrigues, and every kind of debauchery; a character which doubles my astonishment: I shudder with horror at it.

LISE.

O, sir, when I have told you all, you will be much more astonished; for heaven's sake, hear me then: I know you have a noble and a generous heart, that never was form'd for cruelty; let me then ask you, was not your son Euphemon once most dear to you?

EUPHE-

EUPHEMON.

He was, I own to you, he was, and therefore it is that his ingratitude calls for a severer vengeance: I have wept his misfortunes, and his death; but nature, in the midst of all my anguish, left my reason but the more sensible of my injuries, and more resolv'd to punish them.

LISE.

And cou'd you punish him for ever? cou'd you still be so unhappy, so miserable, as to hate him? cou'd you throw from you a repenting child, an alter'd son, whose change wou'd bring back to you the image of yourself? cou'd you repulse this son were he now in tears at your feet?

EUPHEMON.

Alas! you have forgot, you shou'd not thus open a wound that bleeds too fresh, and inflict new torments on me: my son is dead, or far from hence remains still harden'd in his follies. O if he had return'd to virtue, wou'd he not come, and ask forgiveness of me?

LISE.

Yes, and he will come to ask it; you shall hear him; and hear him with compassion too, indeed you shall.

EUPHEMON.

What say you?

LISE.

Yes, sir: if death has not already put an end to his shame and grief, you may perhaps see him dying at your feet with excess of sorrow and repentance.

EUPHEMON.

You see too well how deeply I am affected: my son alive!

LISE.

If he yet lives, he lives to love and honour you.

EUPHEMON.

To love and honour me! impossible! how can I ever know it? from whom must I learn that?

LISE.

From his own heart.

EUPHEMON.

But, do you think —

LISE.

With regard to every thing I have said concerning him, you may depend on my veracity.

EUPHEMON.

Come, you have kept me in suspense too long; have pity on my declining years. Alas! I am full of hopes,

hopes, and fears: I did indeed love my son, these tears speak for me: I lov'd him tenderly. O if he yet lives! if he is return'd to virtue! explain, I beseech you, speak to me, tell me all.

L I S E.

I will: it is time now, and you shall be satisfy'd.

[She comes forward a little, and speaks to young Euphemon behind the scene.

Come forth.

S C E N E VI.

Old EUPHEMON, Young EUPHEMON, LISE.

EUPHEMON.

Good heaven! what do I see?

Young EUPHEMON. [Kneeling.

My father! O, sir, know me, acknowledge me, decide my fate, for life or death depends upon a word.

Old EUPHEMON.

What cou'd bring you hither at this time?

Young EUPHEMON.

Repentance, love, and nature.

L I S E. [Kneeling with young Euphemon.

At your feet behold your children. Yes, sir, we have the same sentiments, the same heart.

Young

Young EUPHEMON. [Pointing to Lise.]

Alas! her tender kindness has pardon'd all my offences: O, gracious sir, follow the example which love has set, and forgive your unhappy son; driv'n as I was to despair, all I hoped for was to die belov'd by her and you; and if I live, I will live to deserve it. You turn away from me; what is it, sir, that transports you thus? I see your heart is mov'd: is it with hatred? is your wretched son condem'd?

Old EUPHEMON. [Raising up his son, and embracing him.]

'Tis love; 'tis tendernes: I forgive thee: if thou art restor'd to virtue, I am still thy father.

L I S E.

And I thy wife. O, sir, long since our hearts were united; permit us at your feet to renew our vows: it is not your riches he asks of you, he brings you now a heart too pure for such a wish; he wants nothing: if he is virtuous, I have enough for both, and he shall have it all.

S C E N E

SCENE VII.

To them RONDON, M. de CROUPILLAC, FIERENFAT,
Bailiff's Follower, Attendants.

FIERENFAT.

Yonder he is, talking to her still; let us shew ourselves men of courage, and take him by surprise.

RONDON.

Ay, let us be bold, we are fix to one.

LISE. [To Rondon.

Now, sir, open your eyes, and see who it is I love.

RONDON.

'Tis he.

FIERENFAT.

Who?

LISE.

Your brother.

Old EUPHEMON,

The same, sir.

FIERENFAT.

You are pleased to jest, sir: this scoundrel my brother?

LISE.

Yes, sir.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

Upon my honour! I am very glad to hear it.

RONDON.

RONDON.

What wonderful metamorphosis ; why this is my droll valet.

FIERENFAT.

So, so, I play a pretty extraordinary part here : why, what brother is this ? ha !

OLD EUPHEMON.

He is your brother, sir ; I had lost him ; but heaven and repentance has restor'd him to me.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

And luckily enough for me.

FIERENFAT.

The rascal is come back only to take away my wife from me.

YOUNG EUPHEMON. [To Fierenfat.

'Tis fit, sir, that you know me ; and let me tell you, sir, 'twas you took her from me, not I from you. In better days I had her heart : the folly of rash and unexperienc'd youth depriv'd me of a treasure which I did not know the value of : but on this happy day I have found again my virtue, my mistress, and my father : the rights of blood and the rights of love are at once restor'd to me, and perhaps you envy me the sudden, the unexpected blessings. But take my inheritance ; I give it you freely : you are fond of riches, and I of

her :

her: thus shall both be happy; you in my possessions, and I in my Life's heart.

Old EUPHEMON.

His disinterested goodness shall not be thus reward-ed. No, Euphemon, thou shalt not be so unworthy of her.

RONDON.

Very good; very fine indeed!

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For my part, I'm astonish'd, and yet not displeas'd: 'tis a comfort to me to think the gentleman is come on purpose to revenge, as it were, my charms.

[To Euphemon.

Quick, quick, sir; marry her as soon as possible; heav'n is on your side, and to be sure made that lady on purpose for you; you were born for each other; and, by this lucky accident, 'tis ten to one if I don't recover my president.

LISE.

[To Rondon.

With all my heart. You, my dear father, will per-mit my faithful heart, which can be given but to one, to return to its right owner.

RONDON.

Why—if his brain is not quite so much turn'd, and—

LISE.

LISE.

O, I'll answer for him.

RONDON.

If he loves you ; if he is prudent——

LISE.

O doubt it not.

RONDON.

And if Euphemon will give him a good fortune,
why—I agree.

FIERENFAT.

To be sure I am a great gainer in this affair, by
finding a new brother ; but then I lose my wedding
expences, my fortune, and a wife into the bargain.

M. de CROUPILLAC.

For shame, thou scoundrel wretch, for ever in pursuit
of riches ! have not I, in notes, bonds, and houses,
enough to live upon, and more, much more, than
you deserve ? Am I not your first love ? Didst thou
not swear fidelity to me ? Have not I it all under your
own hand ? your madrigals without sense, your songs
without wit, your promises without meaning ? But we'll
try it at law, sir : I'll produce them in a court of jus-
tice ; and the parliament, in such a case, I am sure,
ought to make an act on purpose to punish ingratitude.

RONDON.

My good friend, take care of yourself, and tremble at her resentment: let me advise you to marry, if it be only to get shut of her.

OLD EUPHEMON. [To M. de Croupillac.

I am surpris'd at the passion you expres for my son; methinks even the suit you threaten him with must sooth his vanity; the cause of your anger does him too much honour: but permit me to address myself to the dear object that has restor'd my son. Be united, my children, and embrace as brothers: and you, my friend, [Turning to Rondon] must return thanks to heav'n, whose goodness hath done all for the best. And henceforth,

Of youth misguided, let us learn, whate'er
Their follies threaten, never to despair.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.

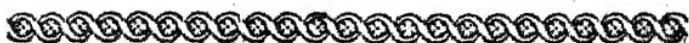


M E R O P E.

A

T R A G E D Y.

Represented in 1743.





A

L E T T E R

F R O M T H E

Jesuit TOURNEMINE to Father BRUMOY,

O N

The TRAGEDY of M E R O P E.

Rev. FATHER,

THE *Merope* which you desir'd to be returned last night, I have sent you this morning at eight o'clock. I have taken time to read it with attention. Whatever success the fluctuating taste of *Paris* may think proper to bestow on it, I am satisfy'd, that posterity will applaud it as one of our best performances, and indeed as the model of true tragedy. *Aristotle*, the legislator of the stage, has allotted to *Merope* the first rank amongst the fine subjects for tragedy. It is treated by *Euripides*, we know, and in such a manner, as we learn from *Aristotle*, that whenever his *Cresphontes* was exhibited at *Athens*, that ingenious people,

people, who were accustomed to the finest dramatic performances, were struck, ravish'd and transported in the most extraordinary manner. If the taste of *Paris* shou'd not correspond with that of *Athens*, we know which is to blame. The *Cresphontes* of *Euripides* is lost; Mr. *Voltaire* has restored it to us. You, my dear sir, who have given us an *Euripides* in *French*, exactly as he appeared to admiring *Greece*, have acknowledged in the *Merope* of our illustrious friend, the natural, the simple, and the pathetic of *Euripides*. Mr. *Voltaire* has preserved the simplicity of the subject, has not only disencumber'd it from superfluous episodes, but from many unnecessary scenes also: the danger of *Egithus* alone fills the stage: the interest increases from scene to scene, till we come to the catastrophe, the surprise of which is managed and prepared with the greatest art. We expect it indeed from the grand-son of *Alcides*. Every thing passes upon the stage as it did in *Mycenæ*. The theatrical strokes are not forced and unnatural; or such as, by their great degree of the marveileus, shock all probability: they arise entirely from the subject: it is the historical event represented to us in the most lively manner. It is impossible not to be deeply mov'd and affected by that scene where *Narbas* arrives, at the very instant when

when *Merope* is going to sacrifice her son, on a supposition that she is about to revenge him: or by that scene, where she has no other means of saving him from inevitable death, than by discovering him to the tyrant. The fifth act equals, if not surpasses, any of those few excellent last acts, which our stage has to boast of. Every thing passes without; notwithstanding which the author has so artfully and judiciously contrived, as to bring all the action before us: the narration by *Ismenia* is not one of those studied artificial pieces which are foreign to the subject; where the poet's wit is made to shine out of its place, such as throw an air of coldness and insipidity over the whole fable. This is nothing but action throughout. The trouble and agitation visible in *Ismenia*, are expressive of the tumult she describes*. I say nothing of the versification, which

is

* The French Sentence is as follows: ' Je ne parle point de la *versification*; le poete, admirable *versificateur*, s'est surpassé; jamais sa *versification* ne fut plus belle & plus claire : ' which, literally translated, would run thus: ' I say nothing of the *versification*; the poet, an admirable *versificateur*, has surpassed himself; never was his *versification* so beautiful and so clear.' Here we see the words *versificateur* and *versification* repeated no less than three times in three lines. An English Ear is too delicate to admit of this. I have been frequently obliged to vary the turn and expression of the sentence, to avoid this repetition of the same word, which *Voltaire* himself is often guilty of, though, in general, a correct writer.

is more clear and beautiful, than any I remember to have seen, even in *Voltaire*, who is certainly an excellent poet: all those, in short, who feel an honest indignation at the corruption and depravity of our present taste; all who have at heart the reformation of our stage; who wish, that, by a careful imitation of the *Greeks*, whom in many perfections of the drama we have surpassed, we might endeavour to obtain the true end and design of it, by making the theatre, what it might be made, the school of virtue: all those, who think thus rationally and seriously, must be pleased to see so great and celebrated a poet as *Voltaire* employing his fine talents in such a tragedy as this, without love in it.

He has not imprudently hazarded the success of so noble a design; but in the place of love has substituted sentiments of virtue, which are not less forcible. As much prejudiced as we are in favour of tragedies founded on love intrigues, it is nevertheless true, (and we have often observed it) that those tragedies, which have met with the greatest success, were not indebted to their love scenes for it: on the other hand, all our good critics allow, that romantic gallantry has disgraced and degraded our stage, and some of our best writers also. The great *Cornelie* was sensible of this;

he

he submitted, not without reluctance, to the reigning taste of the age; not venturing to banish love entirely, he went at least so far as to banish successful love: he wou'd not permit it to appear weak or mean, but rais'd it even to heroism, chooing rather to go beyond nature, than to sink it into a too tender and contagious passion.

Thus, Rev. father, have I sent you that judgment which your illustrious friend seem'd desirous of: I wrote it in haste, which is a proof of my regard; but the paternal friendship which I have had for him, even from his infancy, hath not so far prevail'd as to blind me in his favour: You will let him see what I have wrote. I have the honour to be, my dear friend, my dear son, the glory of your father, as I ever must be, sincerely your's,

Dec: 23, 1738.

TOURNEMINE.

A

L E T T E R
TO THE
MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI,

Author of the ITALIAN MEROPÉ,
and many other celebrated Performances.

SIR,

THE Greeks and Romans, to whom modern *Italy*, as well as all other nations, is indebted for almost every thing, dedicated their works, without the ridiculous form of compliments, to their friends, who were masters of the art: by this claim I take the liberty of addressing to you the *French Merope*.

The *Italians*, who have been the restorers of almost all the fine arts, and the inventors of many, were the first, who, under the auspices of *Leo the Tenth*, revived tragedy; and you, sir, are the first who, in this age, when the *Sophoclean* art became enervated by love-intrigues, often foreign to the subject, and as often debased by idle buffooneries, that reflected

reflected dishonour on the taste of your ingenious countrymen, you, sir, were the first who had courage and genius enough to hazard a tragedy without gallantry, a tragedy worthy of *Athens* in its glory; wherein the maternal affection constitutes the whole intrigue, and the most tender interest arises from the purest virtue. *France* prides itself in her *Athaliah*: it is indeed the master-piece of our stage, perhaps of poetry itself: of all the pieces that are exhibited amongst us, it is the only one where love is not introduced: but at the same time we must allow, that it is supported by the pomp of religion, and that majesty of eloquence which appears in the prophets. You had not that resource, and yet you have so contrived, as to furnish out five acts, which it is so extremely difficult to fill up without episodes. I must own, your subject appeared to me much more interesting and tragical than that of *Athaliah*; and even if our admirable *Racine* had worked up his master-piece with more art, more poetry, and more sublimity than he has, yours, I am satisfied, would have drawn more tears from the audience.

The preceptor of *Alexander*, (kings ought always to have such preceptors) the great *Aristotle*, that extensive genius, so just, and so deeply versed in all the learning of those times, *Aristotle*, in his art of

poetry, has declared, that the meeting of *Merope* and her son was the most interesting circumstance of the whole *Grecian* theatre. This stroke was, in his opinion, infinitely superior to all the rest. *Plutarch* tells us, that the *Greeks*, who, of all the people in the world, had the quickest feeling, trembled with fear, least the old man, who was to stop the arm of *Merope*, should not come time enough. That piece, which was played in his time, and a few fragments of which are still extant, appeared to him the most affecting of all the tragedies of *Euripides*; but it was not the choice of his subject alone to which that poet owed his success, though in every species of the drama, a happy choice is, no doubt, of the greatest service.

France has seen several *Meropes*, but none of them ever succeeded: the authors perhaps overloaded this simple subject with foreign ornaments: it was the naked *Venus* of *Praxiteles* which they wanted to cover with tinsel. It requires a great deal of time to teach men, that every thing which is great should be simple and natural. In 1641, when the *French* stage began to flourish, and even to raise itself above that of *Greece*, by the genius of *P. Corneille*, Cardinal *Richelieu*, who ambitiously sought for glory of every kind, and who had just then built a magnificent hall,

for theatrical representations, in the Palais Royal, of which he had himself furnished the design, had a *Merope* played there under the name of *Telephonte*; the plot of it is generally believed to have been entirely his own. There are about a hundred verses in it, supposed to be written by him; the rest was by *Colletet*, *Bois-Roberts*, *Dinocrates*, and *Chapelin*; but all the power of Cardinal Richelieu could not impart to those writers that genius which they never possessed: his own was not indeed adapted to the stage, though he had a good taste; so that all he could do, or that could be expected from him, was to patronise and encourage the great *Cornelie*.

Mr. *Gilbert*, resident of the celebrated Queen *Christina*, in 1643, gave us his *Merope*, which is at present as little known as the other. La *Chapelle*, of the French academy, author of a tragedy called *Cleopatra*, which was played with some success, gave us another *Merope* in 1683, and took care to insert a love episode: he complains withal in his preface, that the critics reproach'd him with too great a degree of the marvellous; but he was mistaken, it was not the marvellous that sunk his performance, but in reality the want of genius, added to the coldness and insipidity of his versification: this is the great point, the

capital fault, that condemns so many poems to oblivion.

The art of eloquence in verse is of all arts the most difficult and the most uncommon : there are a thousand geniuses to be found, who can plan a work, and put it into verse after the common manner ; but to treat it like a true poet, is a talent which is seldom bestowed on above two or three men on the face of the whole earth.

In December, 1701, M. *de la Grange* played his *Amasis*, which is nothing more than the subject of *Merope* under another name. Gallantry has its share in this performance likewise ; and there is more of the marvellous in it, even than in *la Chapelle's* : but it is more interesting, conducted with more art and genius, and written with more warmth and power ; notwithstanding which, it met with no great success ;

Et habent sua fata libelli.

Since that, however, it has been revived with great applause ; and is one of those few pieces which generally gives pleasure in the representation.

Before and after *Amasis* we have had several tragedies, on subjects very nearly resembling this, wherein a mother is going to revenge the death of her son on the son himself, and discovers him just at the instant

instant when she was about to kill him. We frequently saw on our stage that striking but rarely probable situation, wherein a person comes with a poignard in his hand ready to destroy his enemy, and another arrives at the same instant, and snatches it from him. This incident recommended, at least for a time, the *Canina* of *Thomas Corneille*.

But amongst all the tragedies on this subject, which I have here enumerated, there is not one of them but what is filled with some episode of love, or rather gallantry; for every thing must give way to the reigning taste. But you must not believe, sir, that this unhappy custom of loading our tragedies with ridiculous love intrigues was owing to *Racine*; a crime, which, in *Italy*, I know he is generally reproach'd with: on the contrary, he did every thing in his power to reform the public taste in this particular: the passion of love is never brought in by him as a mere episode; it is the foundation or ground-plot of all his pieces, and forms the principal interest: it is certainly of all the passions the most truly theatrical, the most fruitful in sentiments, and admits of the greatest variety: it ought, therefore, no doubt, to be the soul of a dramatic performance, or entirely to be banished from it: if love is not tragical, it is insipid; and

when it is tragical, it shou'd reign alone ; it was never made for a second place. It was *Rotrou*, or rather we must own the great *Corneille* himself, who, in his creation of the stage, at the same time disfigur'd and disgrac'd it, by those ridiculous intrigues, bespoken, as it were, and made on purpose, those affairs of gallantry, which not being true passions, were unworthy of the stage : if you wou'd know the reason why *Corneille*'s tragedies are so seldom play'd, the reason is plain enough : it is because, in his *Otho*,

‘ *Otho* makes a compliment to his mistress more like a man of wit than a real lover : he follows step by step the effort of his memory, which it is much more easy to admire than to believe. *Camilla* herself seem'd to be of this opinion ; she wou'd have liked much better a discourse less study'd. — Tell me then, when *Otho* made love to *Camilla*, was he contented, or was she kind ?’

It is because, in *Pompey*, *Cleopatra* (a useless character) says that *Cæsar*

‘ Sighs for her, and in a plaintive stile calls himself her captive, even in the field of victory.’

It is because *Cæsar* asks *Antony*, ‘ If he has seen this adorable queen ? ’ to which *Antony* replies,* ‘ yes, my lord, I have seen her, she is incomparable.’

It is because, in *Sertorius*, old *Sertorius* falls in love, not only because he likes the lady, but with a political view, and cries out,

‘ I love : but it suits my age so ill to be in love,
‘ that I even conceal it from the fair one who has
‘ charm’d me. As I know that the deep and yellow
‘ wrinkles on my forehead can have no great pow’r
‘ in captivating the sensés.

It is because, in *Oedipus*, *Theseus* begins by saying
‘ to *Dirce*, whatever dreadful havoc the plague may
‘ make here, absence to true lovers is far more dread-
‘ ful.’

In a word, it is because such love as this will never make us shed tears ; and when that passion does not affect us, it must be quite insipid.

I have said no more here, sir, than what all good judges, and men of taste, say to one another every

* The French is,

Oui, Seigneur, je l’ai vué, elle est incomparable.

Conversation of this kind, as *Voltaire* intimates, is much too low and familiar for the dignity of tragedy : but its being labour’d into verse at the same time doublets makes it still more ridiculous. One wou’d scarce indeed have imagin’d, that the boasted *Corneille* cou’d ever have written such contemptible stuff as the lines here quoted.

day ; what you have often heard at my house ; in short, what every body thinks, but none dare to publish : you know well enough the nature of mankind : half the world write in opposition to their own opinions, for fear of shocking receiv'd prejudices and vulgar errors. With regard to myself, who have never mix'd any political reserve with my sentiments on literature, I speak the truth boldly, and will add, that I respect *Corneille* more, and have a higher opinion of the real merit of this great father of the stage, than those who praise him indiscriminately, and are blind to all his faults.

* *A Merope* was exhibited at *London* in 1731 : who wou'd have thought a love-intrigue shou'd ever have been thought of at that time ? But ever since the reign of *Charles II.* love has taken possession of the English stage ; though there is not a nation upon earth by whom that passion is so ill painted ; but the intrigue so absurdly brought in, and so badly treated,

* Notwithstanding what Mr. *Voltaire* has here asserted, concerning an *English Merope*, acted at *London* in 1731, I cannot, by all the enquiry I have made amongst persons concern'd in the theatres at that time, discover that any such tragedy was ever exhibited, and imagine it must therefore have been a mistake of Mr. *Voltaire's*, whose veracity, in cases of this nature, is not always to be depended on.

is the least fault of the *English Merope*. The young *Aegisthus*, deliver'd out of prison by a maid of honour, who is in love with him, is brought before the queen, who presents him with a bowl of poison, and a dagger, and speaks thus to him: 'if you don't swallow the poison, this dagger shall put an end to your mistress's life.' The young man drinks the poison, and is carry'd off in the agonies of death: he comes back in the fifth act coldly to inform *Merope* that he is her son, and that he has slain the tyrant. *Merope* asks him how this miracle was perform'd: to which he replies, that a friend of the maid of honour had put poppy-water, instead of poison, into the cup. 'I was only asleep (says he) when they thought me dead; I learn'd, when I awake, that I was your son, and immediately kill'd the tyrant.' Thus ends the tragedy; no doubt but it met with a bad reception: but is it not strange that it shou'd ever have been represented? Is it not a proof that the *English* stage is not yet refin'd? It seems as if the same cause that deprives the English of any excellency in, or genius for music and painting, takes from them also all perfection in tragedy. This island, which has produc'd the finest philosophers in the world, is not

equally

equally productive of the fine arts ; and if the * *English* do not seriously apply themselves to the study of those precepts which were given them by their excellent country-men, *Addison* and *Pope*, they will never come near to other nations in point of taste and literature.

But whilst the subject of *Merope* has been thus disgrac'd and disfigur'd in one part of *Europe*, it has met with better fate in *Italy*,, where it has for a long time been treated in the true taste of the ancients. In this sixteenth century, which will be famous throughout all ages, the count de *Torelli* gave us his *Merope* with chorusses. If in *La Chapelle*'s tragedy we find all the faults of the *French* stage, such as useless intrigues episodes, and a romantic air ; and in the *English* author the highest degree of indecency, barbarism, and

* Poor *England* ! depriv'd in one short sentence of all taste and genius for music, painting, and dramatic poetry ; an island of savages and barbarians : cou'd one have expected a censure so cruel and unjust from a writer of so much merit as *Voltaire*? A few lines before he had told us, that there is not a nation upon earth wherein love is so ill painted as by the *English* writers. Did Mr. *Voltaire* never hear of such persons as *Rowe*, *Otway*, or *Southern*? But such is the force of prejudice, that nothing can get the better of it ; and yet this inconsistent censurer (for such we must esteem him,) can boast in the very next page, that *his love to his own country has never shut his eyes against the merit of foreign writers.*

— Nemo sicut unquam
Tam dispar sibi —

absurdity ;

aburdity; we likewise meet in the *Italian* with all the faults of the *Greek* theatre, such as the want of action, and declamation. You, sir, have avoided all the rocks which they split upon; you, who have done honour to your country, by complete models of more than one kind, you have given us in your *Me-rope* an example of a tragedy that is at once both simple and interesting.

The moment I read I was struck with it; my love to my own country hath never shut my eyes against the merit of foreigners. On the other hand, the more regard I have for, the more I endeavour to enrich it, by the addition of treasures that are not of its own growth. The desire which I had of translating your *Æirope*, was increas'd by the honour of a personal acquaintance with you at *Paris*, in the year 1733. By loving the author, I became still more enamour'd with his work; but when I sat down to it, I found it was impossible to bring it on the *French* stage. We are grown excessively delicate: like the *Sybarites* of old, we are so immers'd in luxury, that we cannot bear that rustic simplicity, and that description of a country life, which you have imitated from the *Greek* theatre. I am afraid our audiences wou'd not suffer young *Ægisthus* to make a present of his ring to the man that stops him. I cou'd not have ventur'd to

feize

seize upon a hero, and take him for a robber; though, at the same time, the circumstances he is in authorises the mistake. Our manners, which probably admit of many things which your's do not, wou'd not permit us to represent the tyrant, the murtherer of *Merope*'s husband and children, pretending, after fifteen years, to be in love with her; nor cou'd I even have dared to make the queen say to him, *why did not you talk to me of love before, when the bloom of youth was yet on my face?* Conversations of this kind are natural; but our pit, which at some times is so indulgent, and at others so nice and delicate, wou'd think them perhaps too familiar, and might even discover coquetry, where, in reality, there might be nothing but what was just and proper. Our stage wou'd by no means have suffer'd *Merope* to bind her son to a pillar, nor to run after him with a javelin, and an axe in her hand, nor have permitted the young man to run away from her twice, and beg his life of the tyrant: much less cou'd we have suffer'd the confidante of *Merope* to have persuaded *Egisthus* to go to sleep on the stage, merely to give the queen an opportunity of coming there to assasinate him: not but all this is natural: but you must pardon us for expecting that nature shou'd always be presented to us with some strokes of art;

strokes

strokes that are extremely different at *Paris* from those which we meet with at *Verona*.

To give you a proper idea of the different taste and judgment of polite and cultivated nations, with regard to the same arts, permit me here to quote a few passages from your own celebrated performance, which seem dictated by pure nature. The person who stops young *Cresphontes*, and takes the ring from him, says,

Or dunque in tuo paese i servi
Han di coteste gemme ? un bel paese
Sia questo tuo ; nel nostro una tal gemma
Ad un dito real non sconverrebbe.

I will take the liberty to translate this into blank verse, in which your tragedy is written, as I have not time at present to work it into rhyme,

Have slaves such precious jewels where thou liv'st ?
Sure 'tis a noble country ; for, with us,
Such rings might well adorn a royal hand.

The tyrants's confidant tells him, when speaking of the queen, who refuses, after twenty years, to marry the known murtherer of her family,

La Donna, come sai, ricusa e brama

Women, we know, refuse when most they love.

The

The queen's waiting-woman answers the tyrant, who presses her to use her influence in his favour, thus :

— dissimulato in vano

Soffre di febre assalto ; alquanti giorni
Donare è forza a rinfrancar suoi spiriti.

The queen, sir, has a fever, 'tis in vain
To hide it, and her spirits are oppres'd ;
She must have time to recollect them.

In your fourth act, old *Polidore* asks one of *Merope's* courtiers who he is ? To which he replies, I am *Eurifes*, the son of *Nicander*. *Polidore* then, speaking of *Nicander*, talks in the stile of *Homer's Nestor*.

— Egli era humano

E liberal, quando appariva, tutti.
Faceagli honor ; io mi ricordo ancora.
Diquanto ei festeggiò con bella pompa
Le sue nozze con *Silvia*, ch'era figlia
D'Olimpia e di *Glicon* fratel *d'Ipparcho*.
Ju dunque fir quel fanciullin che in corte
Silvia condur solea quasí per pompa :
Parmi' l'altir hieri : O quanto siete presti,
Quanto voi v'affrettate, O giovinetti,
A farvi adulti ed à gridar tacendo
Che noi diam loco !

The most humane, most gen'rous of mankind,
 Where'er he went, respected and belov'd:
 O I remember well the feast he gave
 When to his *Sylvia* wedded, the fair daughter
 Of *Glycon*, brother of the brave *Hipparchus*,
 And chaste *Olympia*: and art thou that infant
 Whom *Sylvia* to the court so often brought
 And fondled in her arms? alas! methinks
 It was but yesterday: how quickly youth
 Shoots up, and tells us we must quit the scene!

In another place the same old man, being invited to
 the ceremony of the queen's marriage, says:

— Oh curioso

Punto io non son, passò stagione. Affai
 Veduti ho sacrificii; io mi recorda
 Di quello ancora quando il re *Cresphonte*
 Incomincio à regnar. Quella fù pompa.
 Ora più non si fanno a questi tempi
 Di cotaï sacrificii. Più di cento
 Fur le beste sivenate i sacerdoti.
 Risplendean tutti, ed ove ti volgeffi.
 Altro non si vedea che argento ed oro.

My time is past, and curiosity
 Is now no more: already I have seen

Enough

Enough of nuptial rites, enough of pomp
 And sacrifice : I still remember well
 The great solemnity, when king *Cresphonter*
 Began his reign : O 'twas a noble night !
 We cannot boast of such in these our days :
 A hundred beasts were offer'd up, the priests
 In all their splendor shone, and nought was seen
 But gold and silver. — — —

All these strokes are natural, all agreeable to the characters and manners represented : such familiar dialogues wou'd, no doubt, have been well receiv'd at *Athens* ; but *Paris* and our pit expect a simplicity of another kind. We may, perhaps, even boast of a more refined taste than *Athens* itself, where, though the principal city of all *Greece*, it does not appear to me that they ever represented any theatrical pieces except on the four solemn festivals ; whereas at *Paris* there is always more than one every day in the year. At *Athens* the number of citizens was computed at only ten thousand, and *Paris* has near eight hundred thousand inhabitants ; amongst whom, I suppose, we may reckon thirty thousand judges of dramatic performances, and who really do pass their judgments almost every day of their lives.

In

In your tragedy you took the liberty to translate that elegant and simple comparison from Virgil.

Qualis populea mærens Philomela sub umbra
Amisitos queritur fætus, &c.

But if I were to take the same in mine, they wou'd say it was fitter for an epic poem : such a rigid master have we to please in what we call the public :

Nescis, heu ! nescis nostra fastidia Romæ :
Et pueri nasum Rhinocerontis habent.

The *English* have a custom of finishing almost all their acts with a similee; but we expect that, in a tragedy, the hero shou'd talk, and not the poet. Our audience is of opinion, that in an important crisis of affairs, in a council, in a violent passion, or a pressing danger, princes and ministers shou'd never make poetical comparisons.

How cou'd I ever venture to make the under characters talk together for a long time? With you, these conversations serve to prepare interesting scenes between the principal actors: they are like the avenues to a fine palace: but our spectators are for coming into it at once. We must therefore comply with the

national

national taste, which is, perhaps, grown more difficult, from having been cloy'd, as it were, with such a variety of fine performances: and yet amongst these recitals, which our excessive severity condemns, how many beauties do I regret the loss of! How does simple nature delight me, though beneath a form that appears strange to us!

I have here, sir, given you some of those reasons which prevailed on me not to follow what I so much admired. I was oblig'd, not without regret, to write a new *Merope*: I have done it in a different manner, but I am far from thinking that I have therefore done it better. I look upon myself, with regard to you, as a traveller to whom an eastern monarch had made a present of some very rich stuffs: the king wou'd certainly permit this traveller to wear them according to the fashion of his own country.

My *Merope* was finish'd in the beginning of the year 1736, pretty nearly as it now stands; studies of another kind prevented me from bringing it on the stage: but what weigh'd most with me was, the hazard which I ran in producing it, after several successful pieces on almost the same subject, though under different names. At length, however, I ventur'd to produce it, and the public gave me a convincing

convincing proof, that they cou'd condescend to see the same matter work'd up in a different manner. That happen'd to our stage which we see every day in a gallery of pictures, where there are many of them on exactly the same subject. The judges are pleas'd by the observation of these different manners, and every one marks down and enjoys, according to his own taste, the character of every painter. This is a kind of happy concurrence, which, at the same time that it contributes towards the perfection of the Art, gives the public a better insight into it. If the *French Merope* has met with the same success as the *Italian*, it is to you, sir, I am indebted for it; to that simplicity in your performance which I have taken for my model, and which I was always an admirer of. Though I walk'd in a different path, you were always my guide. I cou'd have wish'd, after the examples of the *Italians* and *English*, to employ the happy facility of blank verse, and have often call'd to mind this passage of *Rucellai*:

Tu fai purche l' imagine della voce
 Che risponde da i sassi, dove l' echo alberga.
 Sempre nemica fu del nostro regno,
 E fù inventrice delle prime rime.

But

But I am satisfy'd, as I have long since declar'd, that such an attempt wou'd never succeed in *France*, and it wou'd be rather a mark of weakness than good sense, to endeavour to shake off a yoke which so many authors have borne, whose works will last as long as the nation itself. Our poetry has none of those liberties which your's has ; and this is perhaps one of the reasons why the *Italians* got the start of us, by three or four centuries, in this most difficult and most delightful art.

As I have endeavour'd to imitate you in tragedy, I shou'd be glad to follow your example in other branches of literature, for which you are so eminently distinguish'd : I cou'd wish to form my taste by your's in the science of history ; I do not mean the empty barren knowledge of dates and facts, that only informs us at what period of time a man dy'd, who perhaps was a uselesis or a pernicious member of society ; the science of a dictionary, that loads the memory without improving the mind : I mean that history of the human heart which teaches us men and manners, which leads us from error to error, and from prejudice to prejudice, into the effects of the various passions and affections that agitate mankind : which shews us all the evils that ignorance, or knowledge misapply'd, have pro-

duced

duced in the world ; and which, above all, gives us a clue to the progress of the arts, and follows them through the dangers of so many contending powers, and the ruin of so many empires.

It is this which makes history delightful ; and it becomes still more so to me, by the place which you will possess amongst those who have pleas'd and instructed mankind. It will raise the emulation of posterity, to hear that your country has bestow'd on you the most signal honours, that *Verona* has rais'd a statue, with this inscription, TO THE MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI IN HIS LIFE TIME. An inscription as beautiful in its kind as that at Montpellier to *Lewis XIV.* *after his death.*

Deign, sir, to accept, with the respects of your fellow-citizens, those of a stranger, who esteems and honours you as much as if he had been born at *Verona.*

A

L E T T E R

F R O M

Mr. de la LINDELLE to Mr. de VOLTAIRE.

SIR,

YOU had the politeness to dedicate your tragedy of *Merope* to Mr. *Maffei*, and have serv'd the cause of literature both in *Italy* and *France*, by pointing out, from the perfect knowledge which you have of the theatre, the different rules and conduct of the *Italian* and *French* stages. The partial attachment which you have to every thing that comes from *Italy*, added to your particular regard for Mr. *Maffei*, wou'd not permit you to censure the real faults of that excellent writer; but as I have myself nothing in view but truth, and the advancement of the arts, I shall not be afraid to speak the sentiments of the judicious public, and which I am satisfy'd must be your's also.

The Abbé *Desfontaines* had already remark'd some palpable errors in the *Merope* of Mr. *Maffei*; but, according to his usual manner, with more rudeness than justice:

justice: he has mingled a few good criticisms with many bad ones. This satyrist, so universally decry'd, had neither knowledge enough of the *Italian* tongue, nor taste enough to form an equitable judgment.

This then is the opinion of the most judicious amongst those literati whom I have consulted, both in *France* and on the other side of the *Alps*. *Merope* appears to every one of them, past dispute, the most interesting and truly tragic subject that was ever brought on the stage, infinitely beyond that of *Athaliah*; because *Athaliah* does not want to assassinate the young king, but is deceiv'd by the High-Priest, who seeks revenge on her for her former crimes: whereas in *Merope* we see a mother, who, in revenging her son, is on the point of murtherring that very son himself, her only desire, and her only hope: the interest of *Merope* therefore affects us in a very different manner from that of *Athaliah*: but it seems as if Mr. *Maffei* was satisfy'd with what the subject naturally suggested to him, without making use of any theatrical art in the conduct of it.

i. The scenes in many places are not linked together, and the stage is left void; a fault which, in the present age, is looked upon as unpardonable, even in the lowest class of dramatic writers.

2. The actors frequently come in and go out without reason ; a fault no less considerable.

3. There is no probability, no dignity, no decorum, no art in the dialogue : in the very first scene we see a tyrant reasoning in the calmest manner with *Merope*, whose husband and children he had murdered, and making love to her : this wou'd have been hissed at *Paris*, even by the poorest judges.

4. Whilst the tyrant is thus ridiculously making love to the old queen, word is brought that they have found a young man who had committed murder ; but it does not appear through the whole course of the play who it was he had killed : he pretends it was a thief, who wanted to steal his cloaths. How low, little and poor is this ? it would not be borne in a farce at a country fair.

5. The captain of the guard, provost, or whatever you call him, examines the murtherer, who has a fine ring upon his finger : this scene is quite low comedy, and the style is agreeable to it, and worthy of the scene.

6. The mother immediately supposes, that the robber, who was killed, is her son. It is pardonable, no doubt, in a mother to fear every thing ; but a queen, who is a mother, should have required better proofs.

7. In the midst of all these fears, the tyrant *Poliphontes* reasons with *Merope*'s waiting-woman about his pretended passion. These cold and indecent scenes, which are only brought in to fill up the act, wou'd never be suffer'd on a regular stage. You have only, sir, modestly taken notice of one of these scenes, where *Merope*'s woman desires the tyrant not to hasten the nuptials ; because, she says, her mistress has *an attack of a fever* : but I, sir, will boldly aver, in the name of all the critics, that such a conversation, and such an answer, are only fit for *Harlequin*'s theatre.

8. I will add moreover, that when the queen, imagining her son to be dead, tells us she longs to pull the heart out of the murtherer's breast, and tear it with her teeth, she talks more like a *Cannibal* than an afflicted mother ; and that decency shou'd be preserv'd in every thing.

9. *Egithus*, who was brought in as a robber, and who had said that he had himself been attacked, is taken for a thief a second time, and carried before the queen, in spite of the king, who notwithstanding undertakes to defend him. The queen binds him to a pillar, is going to kill him with a dart ; but before she throws it, asks him some questions. *Egithus* tells her, that his father is an old man, upon which the queen

immediately relents. Is not this an excellent reason for changing her mind, and imagining that *Agisthus* might be her own son? a most indisputable mark to be sure: is it so very extraordinary that a young man shou'd have an old father? *Maffei* has added this absurdity, this deficiency of art and genius, to another even more ridiculous, which he had made in his first edition. *Agisthus* says to the queen, ' O *Polydore*, my father.' This *Polydore* was the very man to whom *Merope* had entrusted the care of *Agisthus*. At hearing the name of *Polydore*, the queen cou'd no longer doubt that *Agisthus* was her son: thus the piece was entirely at an end. This error was remov'd; but remov'd, we see, only to make room for a greater.

10. Whilst the queen is thus ridiculously, and without any reason, in suspence, occasioned by the mention of an old man, the tyrant comes in, and takes *Agisthus* under his protection. The young man, who shou'd have been represented as a hero, thanks the king for his life, with a base and mean submission that is disgusting, and entirely degrades the character of *Agisthus*.

11. At length *Merope* and the tyrant are left together: *Merope* exhausts her resentment in reproaches without end. Nothing can be more cold and lifeless than

than these scenes, full of declamation, that have no plot, interest, or contrasted passion in them ; they are school-boys scenes : every thing in a play, that is without action, is useless.

12. There is so little art in this piece, that the author is always forced to employ confidants to fill up the stage. The fourth act begins with another cold and useless scene between the tyrant and the queen's waiting-woman ; who, a little afterwards, lights, we know not how, on young *Egisthus*, and persuades him to rest himself in the porch, merely to give the queen a fair opportunity of dispatching him when he falls asleep ; which he does according to promise. An excellent plot this ! and then the queen comes a second time, with an axe in her hand, in order to kill the young man, who is gone to sleep for that purpose. This circumstance, twice repeated, is surely the height of barrenness, as the young man's sleep is the height of ridicule. Mr. *Maffei* thinks there is genius and variety in this repetition, because the queen comes in the first time with a dart, and the second with an axe. What a strange effect of fancy !

13. At last old *Polydore* comes in *à propos*, and prevents the queen from striking the blow. One wou'd naturally imagine, that this happy instant must pro-

duce a thousand affecting incidents between the mother and son ; but we meet with nothing of this kind : *Egisthus* flies off, and sees no more of his mother : he has not so much as one scene with her. This betrays a want of genius that is insupportable. *Merope* asks the old man what recompence he demands ; and the old fool begs her to make him young again. In this manner the queen employs her time, which, doubtless she shou'd have spent in running after her son : all this is low, ill-placed, and ridiculous to the last degree.

14. In the course of this piece the tyrant is always for espousing *Merope* ; and, to compass his end, he bids her agents tell her, that he will murther all her servants, if she does not consent to give him her hand. What a ridiculous idea, and how extravagant a tyrant ! Cou'd not Mr. *Maffei* have found out a more specious pretext to save the honour of a queen, who had meanness enough to marry the murtherer of her whole family ?

15. Another childish college trick : the tyrant says to his confidant, ‘ I know the art of reigning ; I'll put the bold and rebellious to death ; give the reins to all kinds of vice ; invite my subjects to commit the most atrocious crimes, and pardon the most guilty ; expose the good to the fury of the wicked, &c.’

‘ &c.’ Did ever man pronounce such vile stuff? This declamation of a *regent of sixteen*, doth it not give us a fine idea of a man who knows how to govern? *Racine* was condemned for having made *Maithan* (in his *Athaliah*) say too much against himself; and yet *Maithan* talks reasonably: but here it is to the last degree absurd to pretend, that throwing every thing into confusion is the art of ruling well; it is rather the art of dethroning himself. One cannot read any thing so ridiculous without laughing at it. Mr. *Maffei* is a strange politician.

In a word, sir, this work of *Maffei* is a fine subject, but a very bad performance. Every body at *Paris* agrees, that it wou’d not go through one representation; and the sensible men in *Italy* have a very poor opinion of it. It is vain the author has taken so much pains in his travels, to engage the worst writers he cou’d pick up to translate his tragedy: it was much easier for him to pay a translator, than to make his piece a good one.

THE
A N S W E R
O F

Mr. de VOLTAIRE to Mr. de la LINDELLE.

S I R,

THE letter which you did me the honour to write to me entitles you to the name of *Hypercritic*, which was given to the famous *Scaliger*: you are truly a most redoubtable adversary: if you treat Mr. *Maffei* in this manner, what am I to expect from you? I acknowledge that, in many points, you have too much reason on your side. You have taken a great deal of pains to rake together a heap of brambles and briars; but why wou'd you not enjoy the pleasure of gathering a few flowers? there are certainly many in Mr. *Maffei*; and which, I dare affirm, will flourish for ever. Such are the scenes between the mother and son, and the narration of the catastrophe. I can't help thinking, that these strokes are affecting and pathetic. You say, the subject alone makes all the beauty; but was it not the same subject

in

in other authors who have treated *Merope*? Why, with the same assistance, had they not the same success? Does not this single argument prove, that Mr. *Maffei* owes as much to his genius as to his subject?

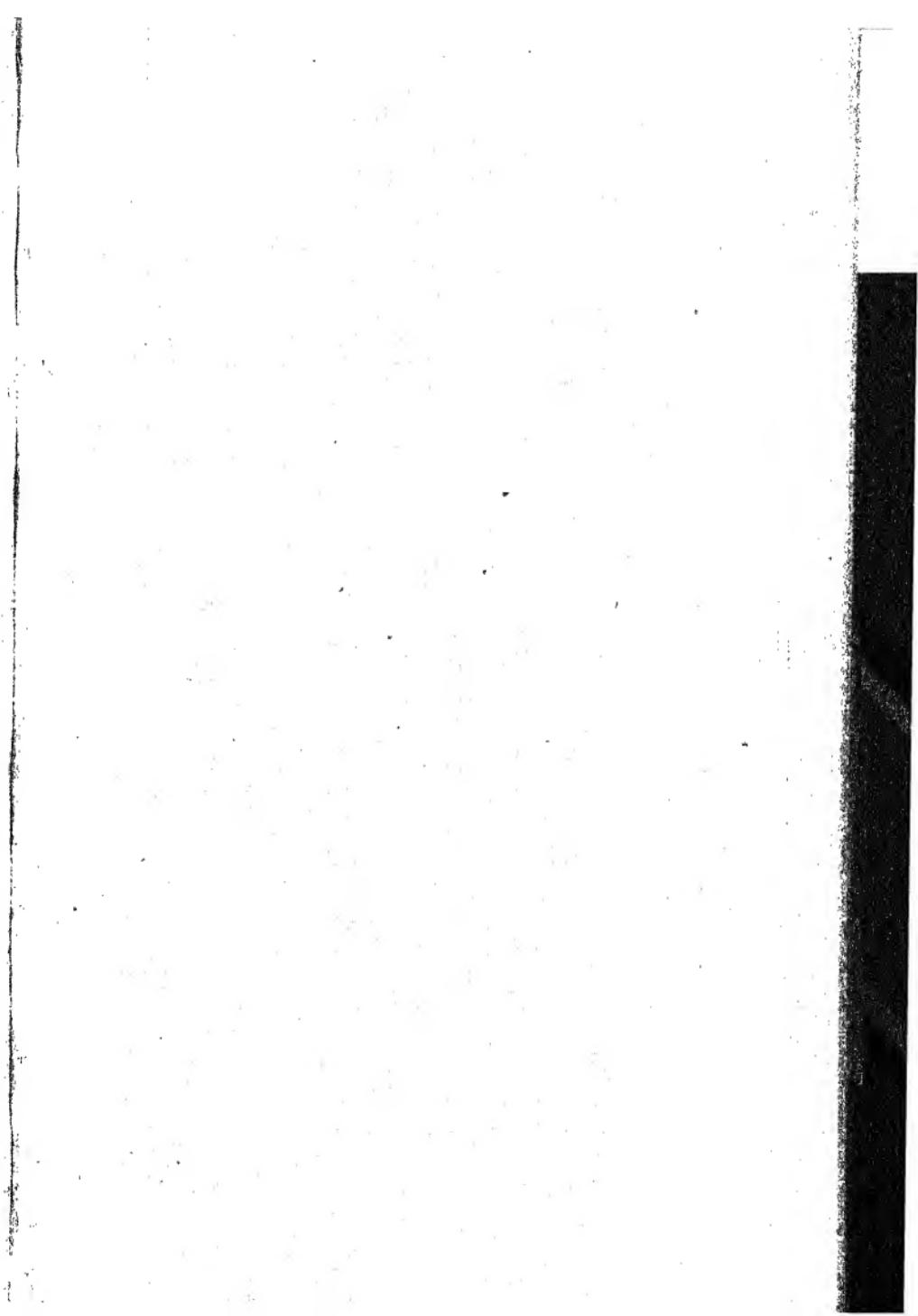
To be plain with you, I think Mr. *Maffei* has shewn more art than myself, in the manner by which he has contrived to make *Merope* think that her son is the murtherer of her son. I cou'd not bring myself to make use of the ring as he did; because, after the *royal ring* that *Boiliou* laughs at in his satires, this circumstance wou'd always appear too trifling on our stage. We must conform to the fashions of our own age and nation; and, for the same reason, we ought not lightly to condemn those of foreigners.

Neither Mr. *Maffei* nor I have sufficiently explain'd the motives that shou'd so strongly incline *Poliphontes* to espouse the queen. This is, perhaps, a fault inherent in the subject; but I must own I think this fault very inconsiderable, when the circumstances it produces are so interesting. The grand point is to affect and draw tears from the spectators. Tears were shed both at *Verona* and at *Paris*. This is the best answer that can be made to the critics. It is impossible to be perfect; but how meritorious is it to move an audience, in spite of all our imperfections! Most cer-

tain

tain it is, that in *Italy* many things are passed over, which wou'd not be pardoned in *France*: first, because taste, decorum, and the stage itself, is not the same in both; secondy, because the *Italians*, having no city where they represent dramatic pieces every day, cannot possibly be so used to things of this kind as ourselves. *Opera*, that splendid monster, has drove out *Melpomene* from among them; and there are so many of the *Castrati* there, that no room is left for *Roscius* and *Æsopus*: but if ever the *Italians* shou'd have a regular theatre, I believe they wou'd soon get beyond us: their stages are more extensive, their language more tractable, their blank verses easier to be made, their nation possessed of more sensibility; but they want encouragement, peace, plenty, &c.

END of the THIRD VOLUME.





MEROPE.

THE
W O R K S
O F
V O L T A I R E.

VOL. XV.

Being VOL. IV. of his

DRAMATIC WORKS.

DRAMATIC WORKS

O F

Mr. DE VOLTAIRE.

Translated by the Rev. Mr. FRANCKLIN.

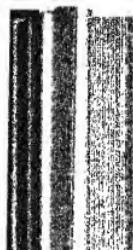
VOL. IV.



L O N D O N.

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M.DCC.LXII.



This VOLUME contains,

MEROPE. A Tragedy.

PREFACE to NANINE. A Comedy.

NANINE. A Comedy.

The BABBLER. A Comedy.

An EPISTLE DEDICATORY to Mr. FALKNER, an
English Merchant, since Ambassador at *Constanti-
nople*.

A Second LETTER to Mr. FALKNER, then Am-
bassador at *Constantinople*.

D R A M A T I S P E R S O N Æ.

MEROPE, Widow of Cresphontes, King of Messene.
ÆGISTHUS, Son of Merope.
POLIPHONTES, Tyrant of Messene.
NARBAS, an old Man.
EURICLES, Favourite of Merope.
EROX, Favourite of Poliphontes.
ISMENIA, Confidant of Merope.

SCENE at MESSENE, in the Palace of Merope.

MEROPE.

M E R O P E.

A

T R A G E D Y.

A C T I. S C E N E I.

ISMENIA, MEROPE.

ISMENIA.

LET not, great queen, thy soul for ever dwell
On images of horror and despair;
The storm is past, and brighter days succeed:
Long hast thou tasted heav'n's severest wrath,
Enjoy its bounties now: the gods, thou feest,
Have bless'd our land with victory and peace;
And proud Messene, after fifteen years
Of foul division and intestine wars,
Now from her ruins lifts her tow'ring front,
Superior to misfortune: now no more
Shalt thou behold her angry chiefs support
Their jarring int'rests, and in guilt alone
United, spread destruction, blood, and slaughter,

VOL. IV.

B

Oe'r

O'er half thy kingdom, and dispute the throne
 Of good Cresphontes : but the ministers
 Of heav'n, the guardians of our sacred laws,
 The rulers, and the people, soon shall meet,
 Free in their choice, to fix the pow'r supreme :
 If virtue gives the diadem, 'tis thine :
 Thine by irrevocable right : to thee,
 The widow of Cresphontes, from our kings
 Descended, must devolve Messene's throne :
 Thou, whom misfortunes and firm constancy
 Have made but more illustrious, and more dear ;
 Thou, to whom ev'ry heart in secret ty'd —

MEROPE.

No news of Narbas ! shall I never see
 My child again ?

ISMENIA.

Despair not, madam : slaves
 Have been dispatch'd on every side ; the paths
 Of Elis all are open to their search :
 Doubtless the object of your fears is plac'd
 In faithful hands, who will restore to you
 Their sacred trust.

MEROPE.

Immortal gods ! who see
 My bitter griefs, will ye restore my son ?
 Is my Ægisthus living ? have you sav'd

My

My wretched infant ? O preserve him still,
 And shild him from the cruel murth'rer's hand !
 He is your son, the pure the spotless blood
 Of your Alcides. Will you not protect
 The dear dear image of the best of men,
 The best of kings, whose ashes I adore.

ISMENIA.

But wherefore must this tender passion turn
 Thy soul aside from ev'ry other purpose ?

MEROPE.

I am a mother: can't thou wonder yet ?

ISMENIA.

A mother's fondness shou'd not thus efface
 The duty of a queen, your character,
 And noble rank ; tho' in his infant years
 You lov'd this son, yet little have you seen
 Or known of him.

MEROPE.

Not seen him, my Ismenia ?

O he is always present to my heart,
 Time has no pow'r to loose such bonds as these ;
 His danger still awakens all my fears,
 And doubles my affection : once I've heard
 From Narbas, and but once these four years past,
 And that alas ! but made me more unhappy.

Ægisthus, them he told me, well deserves
 A better fate; he's worthy of his mother,
 And of the gods, his great progenitors;
 Expos'd to ev'ry ill, his virtue braves,
 And will surmount them: hope for ev'ry thing
 From him, but be aware of Poliphontes.

ISMENIA.

Prevent him then, and take the reins of empire
 In your own hands.

MEROPE.

That empire is my son's:
 Perdition on the cruel step-mother,
 The lover of herself, the savage heart,
 That cou'd enjoy the pleasures of a throne,
 And disinherit her own blood! O no: Ismenia,
 If my Ægisthus lives not, what is empire,
 Or what is life to me! I shou'd renounce them.
 I shou'd have dy'd when my unhappy lord
 Was basely slain, by men and gods betray'd.
 O perfidy! O guilt! O fatal day!
 O death! for ever present to my sight!
 Methinks ev'n now I hear the dismal shrieks,
 I hear them cry, ' O save the king, his wife,
 His sons; I see the walls all stain'd with blood,
 The flaming palace, helpless women crush'd

Beneath

Beneath the smoking ruins, fear and tumult
 On ev'ry side, arms, torches, death, and horror :
 Then, roll'd in dust, and bathing in his blood,
 Cresphontes pres'd me to his arms, uprais'd
 His dying eyes, and took his last farewell ;
 Whilſt his two hapleſs babes, the tender fruits
 Of our first love, thrown on the bleeding bosom
 Of their dead father, lifted up the hands
 Of innocence, and begg'd me to protect them
 Against the barbrous murtherers : $\text{\textit{Æ}g}iſthuſ$
 Alone escap'd : ſome god defended him.
 O thou who did'ſt protect his infancy.
 Watch o'er and guard him, bring him to my eyes ;
 O let him from inglorious solitude
 Rise to the rank of his great ancestors !
 I've borne his absence long, and groan'd in chains
 These fifteen years : now let $\text{\textit{Æ}g}iſthuſ$ reign
 Instead of Merope : for all my pains
 And ſorrows paſt, be that the great reward.

S C E N E . II.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES.

MEROPE.

Well ! what of Narbas, and my ſon ?

Confus'd

I stand before thee ; all our cares are vain ;
 We've search'd the banks of Peneus, and the fields
 Of fair Olympia, even to the walls
 Of proud Salmeneus, but no Narbas there
 Is to be found or heard of, not a trace
 Remaining of him.

M E R O P E.

Narbas is no more,
 And all is lost.

I S M E N I A.

Whate'er thy fears suggest
 Thou still believ'ſt ; and yet who knows but now,
 Ev'n whilst we speak, the happy Narbas comes
 To crown thy wishes, and restore thy son.

E U R I C L E S.

Perhaps his love, temper'd with fair discretion,
 Which long conceal'd Ægisthus from the eyes
 Of men, may hide his purpos'd journey from thee :
 He dreads the murth'rers hand, and still protects him
 From those who flew Cresphontes : we must strive
 By artful methods to elude the rage
 That cannot be oppos'd : I have secur'd
 Their paſſage hither, and have plac'd some friends
 Of moſt approved valour, whose ſharp eyes
 Will look abroad, and ſafe conduct them to thee.

M E R O P E

MEROPE.

I've plac'd my surest confidence in thee.

EURICLES.

But what alas ! can all my watchfulness
 And faithful cares avail thee, when the people
 Already meet to rob thee of thy right,
 And place another on Messene's throne ?
 Injustice triumphs, and the shameless croud,
 In proud contempt of sacred laws, incline
 To Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Am I fall'n so low ;
 And shall my son return to be a slave ?
 To see a subje^ct rais'd to the high rank
 Of his great ancestors, the blood of Jove
 Debas'd, degraded, forc'd to own a master.
 Have I no friend, no kind protector left ?
 Ungrateful subjects ! have you no regard,
 No rev'rence for the mem'ry of Cresphontes ?
 Have you so soon forgot his glorious deeds,
 His goodness to you ?

EURICLES.

Still his name is dear,
 Still they regret him, still they weep his fate,

And pity thine : but pow'r intimidates,
And makes them dread the wrath of Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Thus, by my people still oppres'd, I see
Justice give way to faction, int'rest still,
The arbiter of fate, sells needy virtue
To pow'rful guilt ; the weak must to the strong
For ever yield : but let us hence, and strive
To fire once more their coward hearts to rage
And fierce resentment, for the injur'd blood
Of Hercules : excite the people's love ;
Flatter their hopes ; O tell 'em, Euricles,
Their master is return'd.

EURICLES.

I've said too much
Already ; Poliphontes is alarm'd :
He dreads your son ; he dreads your very tears :
Restless ambition, that holds nothing dear
Or sacred but itself, has fill'd his foul
With bitterness and pride : because he drove
The ruffian slaves from Pylos and Amphrysa,
And sav'd Messene from a band of robbers,
He claims it as his conquest : for himself
Alone he acts, and wou'd enslave us all :
He looks towards the crown, and to attain it

Wou'd

M E R O P E .

II

Wou'd throw down ev'ry fence, break every law,
Spill any blood that shall oppose him : they
Who kill'd thy husband were not more revengeful,
More bloody, than the cruel Poliphontes.

M E R O P E .

I am entangled in some fatal snare
On ev'ry side, danger and guilt surround me :
This Poliphontes, this ambitious subject,
Whose crimes —

E U R I C L E S .

He's here : you must dissemble.

S C E N E III.

M E R O P E . P O L I P H O N T E S , E R O X .

P O L I P H O N T E S .

Madam,

At length I come to lay my heart before you :
I've serv'd the state, and my successful toils
Have open'd me a passage to the throne :
Th' assembled chiefs a while suspend their choice,
But soon must fix it, or on Merope,
Or Poliphontes ; the unhappy sueds
That laid Meflene waste, and fill'd the land
With blood and slaughter, all are bury'd now.
In peaceful harmony, and we alone
Remain to part the fair inheritance.

We shou'd support each other's mutual claim ;
 Our common int'rest, and our common foes,
 Love for our country, reason, duty, all
 Conspire to join us, all unite to say
 The warrior, who reveng'd thy husband, he
 Who sav'd thy kingdom, may aspire to thee.
 I know these hoary locks, and wrinkled brow,
 Have little charms to please a youthful fair one.
 Thou'rt in the bloom of spring, and may'st despise
 The winter of my days ; but statesmen heed not
 Such fond objections : let the royal wreath
 Hide these grey hairs, a sceptre and a queen
 Will recompense my toils : nor think me rash,
 Or vain, you are the daughter of a king,
 I knew you are, but your Messene wants
 A master now ; therefore remember, madam,
 If you wou'd keep your right, you must — divide it.

MEROPE.

Heav'n, that afflicts me with its bitt'rest woes,
 Prepar'd me not for this, this cruel insult :
 How dar'st thou ask it ? wert thou not the subject
 Of great Cresphontes ? think'st thou I will e'er
 Betray the mem'ry of my dearest lord,
 To share with thee his son's inheritance,
 Trust to thy hands his kingdom and his mother ?

Think it

Think'st thou the royal wreath was made to bind
A soldier's brows ?

POLIPHONTES.

That soldier has a right
To rule the kingdom which his arm defended.
What was the first that bore the name of king,
But a successful soldier ? he who serves
His country well requires not ancestry
To make him noble : the inglorious blood,
Which I receiv'd from him who gave me life,
I shed already in my country's cause,
It flow'd for thee ; and, spite of thy proud scorn,
I must at least be equal to the kings
I have subdued : but, to be brief with you,
The throne will soon be mine, and Merope
May share it with me, if her pride will deign
T'accept it : I've a pow'rful party, madam.

MEROPE.

A party ! wretch, to trample on our laws :
Is there a party which thou dar'st support
Against the king's, against the royal race ?
Is this thy faith, thy solemn vows, thy oath,
Sworn to Cresphontes, and to me ; the love,
The honour due to his illustrious shade,

His wretched widow, and his hapless son ;
The gods he sprang from, and the throne they gave ?

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis doubtful whether yet your son survives ;
But grant that, from the mansions of the dead,
He shou'd return, and in the face of heav'n
Demand his throne, believe me when I say
He wou'd demand in vain ; Messene wants
A master worthy of her, one well prov'd,
A king who cou'd defend her : he alone
Shou'd wield the sceptre who can best revenge
His country's cause : Ægisthus is a child,
Yet unexperienc'd in the ways of men,
And therefore little will his birth avail him ;
Nought hath he done for us, and nought deserv'd :
He cannot purchase at so cheap a rate
Messene's throne, the right of pow'r supreme
Descends no more, the gift of nature, here
From son to son ; it is the price of toil,
Of labour, and of blood ; 'tis virtue's meed,
Which I shall claim : have you so soon forgot
The savage sons of Pylos and Amphrysa,
Those lawless plund'rers ? think on your Cresphonites,
And your defenceless children, whom they slew :
Who sav'd your country then ? who stopp'd their fury ?

Who

Who put your foes to flight, and chased them hence?
Did not this arm revenge that murther'd lord
Whom yet you weep? these, madam, are my rights,
The rights of valour: this is all my rank,
This all my title, and let heav'n decide it.
If thy Ægisthus comes, by me perhaps
He may be taught to live, by me to reign:
Then shall he see how Poliphontes guides
The reins of empire. I esteem the blood
Of great Alcides, but I fear it not;
I look beyond Alcides' race, and fain
Wou'd imitate the god from whom he sprung:
I wou'd defend the mother, serve the son;
Be an example to him, and a father.

MEROPE.

O, sir, no more of your affected cares;
Your gen'rous offers, meant but to insult
My hapless son; if you wou'd wish to tread
In great Alcides' steps, reserve the crown
For his descendant: know, that demi-god
Was the avenger of wrong'd innocence;
No ravisher, no tyrant; take thou care,
And with his valour imitate his justice;
Protect the guiltless, and defend your king,
Else shalt thou prove a worthless successor.

If

If thou wou'dst gain the mother, seek the son ;
 Go, bring him to me ; bring your master here,
 And then perhaps I may descend to you :
 But I will never be the vile accomplice,
 Or the reward of guilt like thine.

SCENE IV.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

EROX.

My lord,

Did you expect to move her ? Does the throne
 Depend on her capricious will ? Must she
 Conduct you to it ?

POLIPHONTES.

'Twixt that throne and me,
 Erox, I see a dreadful precipice
 I must o'erleap, or perish : Merope
 Expects Ægisthus ; and the fickle croud,
 If he returns, perhaps may bend towards him.
 In vain his father's and his brother's blood,
 Have open'd wide my passage to the throne ;
 In vain hath fortune cast her friendly veil
 O'er all my crimes ; in vain have I oppress'd
 The blood of kings, whilst the deluded people
 Ador'd me as their friend, if yet there lives

A hateful offspring of Alcides' race :
 If this lamented son shou'd e'er agaɪn
 Behold Messene, fifteen years of toil
 At once are lost, and all my hopes o'erthrown ;
 All the fond prejudice of birth and blood
 Will soon revive, the mem'ry of Cresphontes,
 A hundred kings for his proud ancestors,
 The boasted honour of a race divine,
 A mother's tears, her sorrows, her despair,
 All will conspire to shake my feeble pow'r :
 Ægisthus is a foe I must subdue :
 I wou'd have crush'd the serpent in his shell,
 But that the diligent and subtle Narbas
 Convey'd him hence, e'er since that time conceal'd
 In some far distant land, he hath escap'd
 My narrowest search, and baffled all my care :
 I stopp'd his couriers, broke th' intelligence
 'Twixt him and Merope ; but fortune oft
 Deserts us : from the silence of oblivion
 Sometimes a secret may spring forth ; and heav'n,
 By slow and solemn steps, may bring down vengeance.

EROX.

Depend, undaunted, on thy prosp'rous fate ;
 Prudence, thy guardian god, shall still prote&t thee :
 Thy orders are obey'd ; the soldiers watch

Each

Each avenue to Elis and Messene ;
 If Narbas brings *Æ*gisthus here, they both
 Must die.

POLIPHONTES.

But say, can't thou depend on those
 Whom thou hast plac'd to intercept them ?

EROX.

Yes :

None of them know whose blood is to be shed,
 Or the king's name whom they must sacrifice.
 Narbas is painted to them as a traitor,
 A guilty vagabond, that seeks some place
 Of refuge ; and the other, as a slave,
 A murth'rer, to be yeilded up to justice.

POLIPHONTES.

It must be so : this crime, and I have done ;
 And yet, when I have rid me of the son,
 I must possess the mother : 'twill be useful :
 I shall not then be branded with the name
 Of an usurper ; she will bring with her
 A noble portion in the people's love :
 I know their hearts are not inclin'd to me ;
 With fears dejected, or inflam'd with hope,
 Still in extremes, the giddy multitude
 Tumultuous rove, and int'rest only binds them,

That

That makes them mine. Erox, thy fate depends
 On my success; thou art my best support:
 Go, and unite them; bribe the sordid wretch
 With gold to serve me, let the subtle courtier
 Expect my favours; raise the coward soul,
 Inspire the valiant, and carest the bold;
 Persuade and promise, threaten and implore:
 Thus far this sword hath brought me on my way;
 But what by courage was begun, by art
 We must complete; that many headed monster,
 The people, must be sooth'd by flatt'ry's pow'r:
 I'm fear'd already, but I wou'd be lov'd.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

HAST thou heard nothing of my dear
 Agisthus?

No news from Elis' frontiers? O, too well
 I know the cause of this ill-boding silence!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

In all our search we have discover'd nought,
 Save a young stranger, reeking with the blood
 Of one whom he had murther'd: we have chain'd,
 And brought him hither.

MEROPE.

Ha ! a murtherer,
 A stranger too ! whom, think'it thou, he has slain ?
 My blood runs cold.

EURICLES.

The mere effect of love
 And tenderness: each little circumstance
 Alarms a soul like thine, that ever dwells
 On one sad object; 'tis the voice of nature,
 And will be heard; but let not this disturb thee,
 A common accident: our borders long
 Have been infested with these ruffian slaves,
 The baneful fruit of our intestine broils;
 Justice hath lost her pow'r; our husbandmen
 Call on the gods for vengeance, and lament
 The blood of half their fellow-citizens,
 Slain by each other's hand: but, be compos'd,
 These terrors are not thine.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Who is this stranger?

Answer me, tell me.

EURICLES.

Some poor nameless wretch,

Such he appears; brought up to infamy,

To guilt, and sorrow.

MEROPE.

Well, no matter who,

Or what he is; let him be brought before me,

Important truths are often brought to light

By meanest instruments. Perhaps my soul

Is too much mov'd; pity a woman's weakness,

Pity a mother who has all to fear,

And nothing to neglect: let him appear;

I'll see, and question him.

EURICLES.

Your orders, madam,

Shall be obey'd.

[To Ismenia.

Tell 'em to bring him here,

Before the queen.

MEROPE.

I know my cares are vain;

But grief o'erpow'rs, and hurries me to acts

Perhaps

Perhaps imprudent; but you know I've cause
 For my despair; they have dethron'd my son,
 And wou'd insult the mother: Poliphontes
 Hath ta'en advantage of my helpless state,
 And dar'd to offer me his hand.

EURICLES.

Thy woes
 Are greater even than thou think'st they are.
 I know this marriage wou'd debase thy honour,
 And yet I see it must be so; thy fate
 Hath bound thee to it by the cruel tie
 Of dire necessity: I know it wears
 A dreadful aspect, yet perchance may prove
 The only means of placing on the throne
 Its rightful master, so th' assembled chiefs
 And soldiers think; they wish——

MEROPE.

My son wou'd ne'er
 Consent to that; no: poverty and exile,
 With all their pains, were far less dreadful to him
 Than these base nuptials.

EURICLES.

If t' assert his rights
 Alone, suffic'd to seat him on the throne,
 Doubtless his pride wou'd spurn the shameful bond:
 But

But if his soul is by misfortune taught
 To know itself, if prudence guides his steps,
 If his own int'rest, if his friends advice,
 And above all, necessity, the first
 Of human laws, have any influence o'er him,
 He wou'd perceive, that his unhappy mother
 Cou'd not bestow on him a dearer mark
 Of her affection.

MEROPE.

Ha ! what say'st thou ?

EURICLES.

Truth,

Unwelcome truth, which nothing but my zeal,
 And your misfortunes, shoul'd have wrested from me.

MEROPE.

Wou'dst thou persuade me then, that int'rest e'er
 Can get the better of my fix'd aversion
 For Poliphontes, you who painted him
 In blackest colours to me ?

EURICLES.

I describ'd him

Ev'n as he is, most dangerous and bold ;
 I know his rashnes, and I know his pow'r ;
 Nought can resist him, he's without an heir.
 Remember that : you say, you love Ægisthus.

MERO-

MEROPE.

I do ; and 'tis that love which makes the tyrant
 Still more detested : wherefore talk'ft thou thus
 Of marriage and of empire ? speak to me
 Of my dear son ; and tell me if he lives ;
 Inform me, Euricles.

EURICLES.

Behold the stranger
 Whom you desir'd to question ; see, he comes.

S C E N E II.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ÆGISTHUS in chains,
 ISMENIA, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS, at the bottom of the stage. [To Ismenia.
 Is that the great unfortunate, the queen,
 Whose glory and whose sorrows reach'd ev'n me
 Amidst the desert wild where I was hid ?

ISMENIA.

'Tis she.

ÆGISTHUS.

'Thou great creator of mankind !
 Thou, who didst form those matchless charms, look
 down
 And guard thy image : virtue on a throne
 Is sure the first and fairest work of heav'n.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Is that the murth'rcr? Can such features hide
 A cruel heart? Come near, unhappy youth,
 Be not alarm'd, but answer me; whose blood
 Is on thy hands?

ÆGISTHUS.

O, queen, forgive me; fear,
 Respect, and grief, bind up my trembling lips.

[Turning to Euricles.]

I cannot speak; her presence shakes my soul
 With terror and amazement.

MEROPE.

Tell me whom

Thy arm has slain.

ÆGISTHUS.

Some bold presumptuous youth,
 Whom fate condemn'd to fall the wretched victim
 Of his own rashness.

MEROPE.

Ha! a youth! my blood
 Runs cold within me: didst thou know him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:

Messene's walls, her fields, and citizens,
 Are new to me.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

And did this unknown youth
Attack thee then ? 'twas in thy own defence ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Heav'n is my witness, I am innocent.
Just on the borders of Pamisus, where
A temple stands, sacred to Hercules,
Thy great progenitor, I offer'd up
To the avenger of wrong'd innocence
My humble prayers for thee ; I had no victims,
No precious gifts to lay before him ; all
I had to give him, was a spotless heart,
And simple vows, the poor man's hecatomb :
It seem'd as if the god receiv'd my homage
With kind affection, for I felt my heart
By more than common resolution fir'd :
Two men, both arm'd, and both unknown, surpris'd
me ;
One in the bloom of youth, the other funk
Into the vale of years : what brings thee here ?
They cry'd, and wherefore for Alcides' race
Art thou a suppliant ? At this word they rais'd
The dagger to my breast ; but heav'n preserv'd me.
Pierc'd o'er with wounds, the youngest of them fell
Dead at my feet ; the other basely fled

Like an assassin : knowing not what blood
 I might have shed, and doubtful of my fate,
 I threw the bloody corpse into the sea,
 And fled ; your soldiers stopp'd me ; at the name
 Of Merope, I yeilded up my arms,
 And they have brought me hither.

EURICLES.

Why these tears,

My royal mistress ?

MEROPE.

Shall I own it to thee ?

I melted with compassion, as he told
 His melancholy tale ; I know not why,
 But my heart sympathis'd with his distress :
 It cannot be, I blush to think it, yet
 Methought I trac'd the features of Cresphontes :
 Cruel remembrance ! wherefore am I mock'd
 With such deceitful images as these,
 Such fond delusions ?

EURICLES.

Do not then embrace

Such vain suspicions, he's not that barbarian,
 That vile impostor, which we thought him.

MEROPE.

No :

Heav'n hath imprinted on his open front

The marks of candour, and of honesty.

Where wert thou born?

ÆGISTHUS.

In Elis.

MEROPE.

Ha! in Elis!

In Elis! sayst thou? Knowst thou aught of Narbas,
Or of Ægisthus? Never hath that name
Yet reach'd thine ear? What rank, condition, friends,
Who was thy father?

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes, madam,
A poor old man: to Narbas, or Ægisthus,
Of whom thou speak'st, I am a stranger.

MEROPE.

Gods!

Why mock ye thus a poor unhappy mortal?
A little dawn of hope just gleam'd upon me,
And now my eyes are plung'd in deepest night:
Say, what rank did thy parents hold in Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

If virtue made nobility, old Sirris
And Polycletes, from whose blood I sprang,
Are not to be despis'd: their lot indeed
Was humble, but their exemplary virtues
Made even poverty respectable:

Cloth'd

Cloth'd in his rustic garb, my honest father
 Obeys the laws, does all the good he can,
 And only fears the gods.

MEROPE.

[Aside.]

How strangely he affects me ! ev'ry word
 Has some new charm :

[Turning to *Ægisthus*.]

But wherefore left you then
 The good old man ? It must be dreadful to him
 To lose a son like thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

A fond desire

Of glory led me hither : I had heard
 Of your Messene's troubles, and your own :
 Oft had I heard of the illustrious queen,
 Whose virtues merited a better fate ;
 The sad recital mov'd my soul ; ashamed
 To spend at Elis my inglorious days,
 I long'd to brave the terrors of the field
 Beneath thy banners : this was my design,
 And this alone : an idle thirst of fame
 Misled my steps, and in their helpless age
 Persuaded me to leave my wretched parents :
 'Tis my first fault, and I have suffer'd for it :
 Heav'n hath aveng'd their cause, and I am fall'n
 Into a fatal snare.

MEROPE.

'Tis plain he is not,
 Cannot be guilty; falsehood never dwells
 With such ingenuous sweet simplicity:
 Heav'n has conducted here this hapless youth,
 And I will stretch the hand of mercy to him:
 It is enough for me he is a man,
 And most unfortunate; my son perhaps
 Ev'n now laments his more distressful fate:
 O he recalls *Ægisthus* to my thoughts:
 Their age the same; perhaps *Ægisthus* now
 Wanders like him from clime to clime, unknown,
 Unpity'd, suffers all the bitter woes
 And cruel scorn that waits on penury:
 Mis'ry like this will bend the firmest soul,
 And wither all its virtues: lot severe
 For a king's offspring, and the blood of gods!
 O if at least——

S C E N E III.

MEROPE, *ÆGISTHUS*, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

Hark! madam, heard you not
 Their loud tumultuous cries? You know not what——

MEROPE.

Whence are thy fears?

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

'Tis Poliphontes' triumph :

The wav'ring people flatter his ambition,
And give their voices for him ; he is chos'n
Messene's king : 'tis done.

ÆGISTHUS.

I thought the gods
Had on the throne of her great Ancestors
Plac'd Merope : O heav'n ! the greater still
Our rank on earth, the more have we to fear :
A poor abandon'd exile, like myself,
Is less to be lamented than a queen :
But we have all our sorrows.

[Ægisthus is led off.

EURICLES. [To Merope.

I foretold it :

You were to blame to scorn his proffer'd hand,
And brave his pow'r.

MEROPE.

I see the precipice
That opens wide its horrid gulph before me ;
But men and gods deceiv'd me ; I expected
Justice from both, and both refus'd to grant it.

EURICLES.

I will assemble yet our little force
Of trusty friends, to anchor our poor bark,

And save it from the fury of the storm ;
To shield thee from the insults of a tyrant,
And the mad rage of an ungrateful people.

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

'Tis not the people's fault ; they love you still,
And wou'd preferre the honour of your crown :
They wish to see you join'd to Poliphontes,
That from your hand he then might seem to hold
The sov'reign pow'r.

MEROPE.

They give me to a tyrant,
Betray Ægisthus, and enslave his mother.

ISMENIA.

They call you to the throne of your fore-fathers :
Obey their voice ; it is the voice of heav'n.

MEROPE.

And woud'st thou have me purchase empty honours
With infamy and shame ?

S C E N E V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

O queen, I tremble
To stand before thee ; now prepare thy heart

For the most dreadful stroke; call forth thy courage
To bear the news.

MEROPE.

I have no courage left,
'Tis worn out by misfortune but no matter.
Proceed, inform me.

EURICLES.

All is past; and fate——
I can no more.

MEROPE.

Go on: my son——

EURICLES.

He's dead:
It is too true: the dreadful news hath shock'd
Your friends, and froze their active zeal.

MEROPE.

Ægisthus, dead! My son,

ISMENIA.

O gods! —————

EURICLES.

Some base assassins
Had in his passage laid the snares of death;
The horrid crime is done.

MEROPE.

O hateful day !

Why shines the sun on such a wretch as me ?
 He's lost ; he's gone : what cruel hand destroy'd him !
 Who shed his blood, the last of my sad race ?

EURICLES.

It was that stranger, that abandon'd slave,
 Whose persecuted virtue you admir'd,
 For whom such pity rose in your kind breast ;
 Ev'n he whom you protected.

MEROPE.

Can it be !

Was he that monster ?

EURICLES.

We have certain proofs,
 And have discover'd two of his companions,
 Who, lurking here, were still in search of Narbas,
 Who had escap'd them : he who flew Ægisthus
 Had taken from your son these precious spoils,
 [The armour is shewn at a distance at the further end of the stage.
 The armour which old Narbas bore from hence.
 The traitor, that he might not be discover'd,
 Had thrown aside these bloody witnessies.

ACT THE FIFTH.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

What hast thou told me? O these trembling hands
 Did on Cresphontes put that very armour
 When first he went to battle. Ye dear reliques,
 O to what hands were ye deliver'd! monster,
 To seize this sacred armour.

EURICLES.

'Tis the same
 Ægisthus did bring hither.

MEROPE.

Now behold it
 Stain'd with his blood! but in Alcides' temple
 Did they not see a poor old man?

EURICLES.

'Twas Narbas:
 So Poliphontes owns.

MEROPE.

O dreadful truth!
 The villain, to conceal his crime, hath cast
 His body to the waves, and bury'd him
 In the rude ocean: O I see it all;
 All my sad fate: O my unhappy son!

EURICLES.

Wou'd you not have the traitor brought before you,
 And question'd here?

S C E N E VI.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA, EROX, guards.

EROX.

Permit me in the name
Of Poliphontes, my rejected master,
Perhaps rejected but because unknown,
To offer you, in this distressful hour,
His best assistance : he already knows
Ægisthus is no more, and bears a part
In your misfortunes.

MEROPE.

That I know he does,
A joyful part, and reaps the fruits of them,
The throne of my Cresphontes, and Ægisthus.

EROX.

That throne he wishes but to share with you,
And throw his sceptre at thy feet ; the crown
He hopes will make him worthy of thy hand :
But to my hands the murth'rer must be giv'n,
For sacred is the pow'r of punishment,
'Tis a king's duty ; he alone must wield
The sword of justice, the throne's best support,
That to his people and to you he owes ;
Midst hymen rites the murth'rer's blood shall flow,
A grateful sacrifice.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

My hand alone

Shall strike the fatal blow: though Poliphontes
 Reigns o'er Messene, he must leave to me
 The work of vengeance: let him keep my kingdom,
 But yield to me the right of punishment:
 On that condition, and on that alone,
 I will be his: go, and prepare the rites;
 This hand, fresh bleeding from the traitor's bosom,
 Shall at the altar join with Poliphontes.

EROX.

Doubtless, the king, whose sympathetic heart
 Feels for your woes, will readily consent.

SCENE VI.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

O Euricles, this vile detested marriage,
 Whate'er I promis'd, ne'er will come to pass:
 This arm shall pierce the savage murth'rer's breast,
 And instant turn the dagger to my own.

EROX.

O! madam, let me by the gods conjure you —

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

They have oppres'd me sorely; I have been
 Too long the object of their wrath divine:
 They have depriv'd me of my dearest child,
 And at their altars shall I ask a husband?
 Shall I conduct a stranger to the throne
 Of my forefathers? woud'st thou have me join
 The Hymeneal to the fun'r'al torch?
 Shall Merope still raise her weeping eyes
 To heav'n, that shines no more on my Ægisthus?
 Shall she wear out her melancholy days
 Beneath a hateful tyrant, and expect
 In tears and anguish an old age of sorrow?
 When all is lost, and not ev'n hope remains,
 To live, is shameful, and to die, our duty.

END of the SECOND ACT.

A C T III. SCENE I.

NARBA'S.

O grief! O horror! O the weight of age!
 The youthful hero's warm imprudent ardor
 Was not to be restrain'd; his courage burst
 Th' inglorious chains of vile obscurity,

And

And he is lost to me, perhaps for ever.
How shall I dare to see my royal mistress !
Unhappy Narbas ! hither art thou come
Without *Æ*gisthus ; Poliphontes reigns,
That subtle proud artificer of fraud,
That savage murth'rer, who pursued us still
From clime to clime, and laid the snares of death
On ev'ry side, fix'd on the sacred throne,
Which by his crimes so oft he hath profan'd,
The proud usurper fits, and smiles secure :
Hide me, ye gods, from his all-piercing eye,
And save *Æ*gisthus from the tyrant's sword :
O guide me, heav'n, to his unhappy mother,
And let me perish at her feet ! once more
I see the palace, where the best of kings
Was basely slain, and his defenceless child
Sav'd in these arms ; and after fifteen years
Shall I return to fill a mother's heart
With anguish ? who will lead me to the queen ?
No friend appears to guide me : but behold,
Near yonder tomb I see a weeping croud,
And hear their loud laments ! within these walls
For ever dwells some persecuting god.

SCENE II.

NARBAS, ISMENIA, at the further end of the stage
several of the queen's attendants, near the tomb of Cresphontes.

ISMENIA.

What bold intruder presses thus unknown
To the queen's presence, and disturbs the peace
Of her retirement? comes he from the tyrant
A spy upon our griefs, to count the tears
Of the afflicted?

NARBAS.

Who soe'er thou art,
Excuse the boldness of a poor old man;
Forgive th' intrusion; I wou'd see the queen,
Perhaps may serve her.

ISMENIA.

What a time is this
Which thou hast chos'n to interrupt her griefs!
Respect a mother's bitter sorrow's; hence,
Unhappy stranger, nor offend her sight.

NARBAS.

O, in the name of the avenging gods,
Have pity on my age, my misfortunes:
I am no stranger here: O, if you serve
And love the queen, forgive the tears that long
Have flow'd for her, and trust a heart that feels
For Merope as deeply as thy own.

What

What tomb is that where you so late did join
Your griefs?

ISMENIA.

The tomb of an illustrious hero,
A wretched father, and a hapless king,
The tomb of great Cresphontes.

NARBAS. [Going towards the tomb.

My lov'd master!

Ye honour'd ashes!

ISMENIA.

But Cresphontes' wife
Is more to be lamented still.

NARBAS.

What worse

Cou'd happen to her?

ISMENIA.

A most dreadful stroke;
Her son is slain.

NARBAS.

Her son! Ægisthus! gods!
And is Ægisthus dead?

ISMENIA.

All know it here.

Too well.

NARBAS.

Her son?

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

A barbarous assassin

Did slay him at Messene's gates.

NARBAS.

O death,

I did foretel thee : horror and despair !

Is the queen sure, and art thou not deceiv'd ?

ISMENIA.

O 'tis too plain ; we have undoubted proofs ;

It must be so : he is no more.

NARBAS.

Is this

The fruit of all my care ?

ISMENIA.

The wretched queen,

Abandon'd to despair, will scarce survive him :

She liv'd but for her child, and now the ties

Are loos'd that bound her to this hated life :

But, e'er she dies, with her own hand she waits

To pierce the murth'rer's heart, and be reveng'd ;

Ev'n at Cresphontes' tomb his blood shall flow.

Soon will the victim, by the king's permission,

Be hither brought, to perish at her feet :

But Merope is lost in grief, and therefore

Wou'd wish to be alone : you must retire.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

If it be so, why shou'd I seek the queen?
 I will but visit yonder tomb, and die.

S C E N E III.

ISMENIA.

[Alone.]

This old man seems most worthy: how he wept!
 Whilst the unfeeling slaves around us seem,
 Like their proud master, but to mock our sorrows:
 What int'rest cou'd he have? yet tranquil pity
 Doth seldom shed so many tears; methought
 He mourn'd the lost *Ægisthus* like a father:
 He must be sought — but here's a dreadful sight.

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES, *ÆGISTHUS* in chains,
 guards, sacrificers.

MEROPE. [Near the tomb.]

Bring forth that horrid victim to my sight;
 I must invent some new unheard of torment,
 That may be equal to his crime; alas!
 Not to my grief, that were impossible.

ÆGISTHUS.

Dear have I bought thy momentary kindness,
 Guardians of innocence, protect me now!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

Before the traitor suffers, let him name
His vile accomplices.

MEROPE. [Coming forward.

He must ; he shall :

Say, monster, what induc'd thee to a crime
So horrible to nature ! how had I
E'er injur'd thee ?

ÆGISTHUS.

Now bear me witness, gods,
You who revenge the perjuries of men,
If e'er my lips knew fraud or base imposture ;
I told thee nought but simple truth ; thy heart,
Fierce as it was, relented at my tale,
And you stretch'd forth a kind protecting hand ;
So soon is justice weary of her task ?
Unweeting I have shed some precious blood :
Whose was it, tell me, what new int'rest sways thee ?

MEROPE.

What interest ? barbarian !

ÆGISTHUS.

O'er her cheek
A deadly paleness spreads : it wounds my soul
To see her thus. O I wou'd spill my blood
A thousand times to save her.

MEROPE.

MEROPÉ.

Subtle villain !

How artfully dissembled is that grief !

He kills me, and yet seems to weep my fate.

[She falls back into the arms of Ismenia.

EURICLES.

Madam, revenge yourself, revenge the laws,
The cause of nature, and the blood of kings.

ÆGISTHUS.

Is this the royal justice of a court ?

Ye praise and flatter first, and then condemn me.

Why did I leave my peaceful solitude ?

O good old man, what will thy sorrows be,

And thou, unhappy mother, whose dear voice

So oft foretold —

MEROPE.

Barbarian, and hast thou

A mother ? I had been a mother yet

But for thy rage, thou hast destroy'd my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

If I am thus unhappy, if he was

Indeed thy son, I ought to suffer for it ;

But though my hand was guilty, yet my heart

Was innocent : heav'n knows I wou'd have giv'n

This day my life to save or his or thine.

MEROPÉ.

MEROPE.

Did'st thou take this armour from him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:

It is my own.

MEROPE.

What say'st thou?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes; I swear

By thee, by him, by all thy ancestors,
My father gave to me that precious gift.

MEROPE.

Thy father! where? in Elis: how he moves me!
What was his name? speak, answer.

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes:

I've told thee so already.

MEROPE.

O thou riv'st

My heart: what foolish pity stopp'd my vengeance?
It is too much: assist me, friends, bring here
The monster, the perfidious —

[Lifting up the dagger.

O ye manes

Of my dear son, this bloody arm —

N A R B A S.

NARBAS. [Entering on a sudden.

O gods!

What woud'st thou do?

MEROPE.

Who calls?

NARBAS.

Stop: stop — alas!

If I but name his mother, he's undone

MEROPE.

Die, traitor.

NARBAS.

Stop.

ÆGISTHUS. [Turning towards Narbas.

My father!

MEROPE.

Ha! his father!

ÆGISTHUS. [To Narbas.

What do I see? and whither wert thou going?

Cam'st thou to be a witness of my death?

NARBAS.

O, madam, go no further: Euricles,
Remove the victim, let me speak to thee.

EURICLES.

[Takes away Ægisthus, and shuts up the lower part of the scene.]

O heav'n!

MEROPE.

MEROPE. [Coming forward.

Thou mak'st me tremble; I was going
T'avenge my son.

NARBAS.

[Kneeling down.

To sacrifice — Ægisthus.

MEROPE.

Ægisthus! ha!

NARBAS.

'Twas he, whom thy rash arm
Had well nigh slain; believe me, 'twas Ægisthus.

MEROPE.

And lives he then?

NARBAS.

'Tis he, it is your son.

MEROPE, [Fainting away in the arms of Ismenia.
I die!

ISMENIA.

Good heav'n!

NARBAS.

[To Ismenia.

Recall her fleeting spirits;

This sudden transport of tumultuous joy,
Mix'd with anxiety and tender fears,
May quite o'erpow'r her.

MEROPE. [Coming to herself.

Narbas, is it you?

Or do I dream? is it my son? where is he?
Let him come hither.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

No: refrain your love,

Restrain your tenderneſſ.

[To Ismenia.

O keep the ſecret;

The ſafety of the queen, and of Ægithus,
Depend on that.

MEROPE.

Alas! and muſt fresh danger
Embitter my new joys? O dear Ægithus,
What cruel god ſtill keeps thee from thy mother?
Was he reſtor'd but to affi&t me more?

NARBAS.

You knew him not, and wou'd have ſlain your ſon:
If his arrival here be once discover'd,
And you acknowledge him, he's loſt for ever.
Diffeſſible therefore, for thou know'ſt that guilt
Reigns in Meſſene: thou art watch'd; be cautious.

SCENE V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, NARBAS, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

'Tis the king's order, madam, that we feize —

MEROPE.

Whom?

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

The young stranger, whom thou had'st condemn'd
To death.

MEROPE, [With transport.

That stranger is my child, my son :
They wou'd destroy him, Narbas, let us fly ——

NARBAS.

Not stay.

MEROPE.

It is my son ; they'll have him from me,
My dear Ægisthus : why is this ?

EURICLES.

The king

Wou'd question him before he dies.

MEROPE.

Indeed !

And knows he then I am his mother ?

EURICLES.

No :

'Tis yet a secret to them all.

MEROPE.

W'ell fly
To Poliphontes, and implore his aid.

NARBAS.

Fear Poliphontes, and implore the gods.

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

Howe'er *Æ*gisthus may alarm the tyrant,
 Thy promis'd nuptials make his pardon sure :
 Bound to each other in eternal bonds,
 Thy son will soon be his ; though jealousy
 May now subsist, it must be lost in love
 When he's your husband.

NARBAS.

He your husband, gods !

I'm thunder struck.

MEROPE.

I will no longer bear
 Such anguish, let me hence.

NARBAS.

Thou shalt not go :

Unhappy mother ! thou shalt ne'er submit
 To these detested nuptials.

EURICLES.

She is forc'd
 To wed him, that she may revenge Cresphontes.

NARBAS.

He was his murth'r'er.

MEROPE.

He ! that traitor !

NARBAS.

Yes :

By Poliphontes thy *Æ*gisthus fell,

His father, and his brothers: I beheld
The tyrant welt'ring in Cresphontes' blood.

MEROPE.

O gods!

NARBAS.

I saw him glorying in his Crimes;
Saw him admit the foe, and through the palace
Spread fire and slaughter; yet appear'd to those
Who knew him not th'avenger of that king
Whom he had slain: I pierc'd the savage crowd,
And in my feeble arms uprais'd your son,
And bore him thence; the pitying gods protected
His helpless innocence: these sixteen years,
From place to place I led him, chang'd my name
To Polycletes, hid him from the foe,
And now at last it seems have brought him hither,
To see a tyrant on Messene's throne,
And Merope the wife of Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Thy tale has harrow'd up my soul.

EURICLES.

Tis Poliphontes.

He comes:

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Is it possible?

Away, good Narbas, hide thee from his rage.

NARBAS.

Now, if Ægisthus e'er was dear to thee,
Dissimble with the tyrant

EURICLES.

We must hide
This secret in the bottom of our hearts,
A word may ruin all.

MEROPE.

[To Euricles.

Go thou and guard

That precious treasure well.

EURICLES.

O doubt it not.

MEROPE.

My hopes depend on thee: he is my son
Remember, and thy king.—The monster comes.

S C E N E VI.

MEROPE, POLIPHONTES, EROX, ISMENIA, Attendants.

POLIPHONTES.

The altar is prepar'd, the throne awaits you,
Our int'rests soon will with our hearts be join'd:

As king, and husband, 'tis my duty now
 Both to defend and to revenge you, madam:
 Two of the traitors I have seiz'd already,
 Who shall repay the murther with their blood:
 But, spite of all my care, thy tardy vengeance
 Hath seconded but ill my purposes:
 You told me you wou'd wish yourself to slay
 The murth'r'er, and I gave him to your justice.

M E R O P E.

O that I might be my own great avenger!

POLIPHONTES.

"Tis a king's duty, and shall be my care.

M E R O P E.

Thine, said'ft thou?

POLIPHONTES.

Wherefore is the sacrifice
 Delay'd? dost thou no longer love thy son?

M E R O P E.

May all his foes meet with their due reward!
 But if this murth'r'er has accomplices,
 By him perhaps I may hereafter learn
 Who kill'd my dear Cresphontes: they who flew
 The father wou'd for ever persecute
 The mother and the son: O if I e'er —

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

I too cou'd wish to be inform'd of that,
And therefore I have ta'en him to my care.

MEROPE.

To thine?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, and I hope to draw
The secret from him.

MEROPE.

But you must not keep
This murth'rer : I must have him ; nay, you promis'd,
You know you did ——

[Aside.

O cruel fate ! my son !

What art thou doom'd to ?

[To Poliphontes.

Pity me, my lord !

POLIPHONTES.

Whence is this sudden transport ? he shall die.

MEROPE.

Who ? he ?

POLIPHONTES.

His death shall satisfy thy foul.

MEROPE.

Ay : but I want to see, to speak to him.

POLIPHONTES.

These starts of passion, and these sudden transports
 Of rage and tenderness, that face of horror,
 Might give me cause perhaps of just suspicion ;
 And, to be plain with you, some strange disgust,
 Some groundless fears, some new alarm, hath rais'd
 This tempest in your soul ; what have you heard
 From that old man who went so lately hence ?
 Why doth he shun me ? what am I to think ?
 Who is he ?

MEROPE.

O my lord ! so lately crown'd
 Do fears and jealousies already wait
 Around your throne ?

POLIPHONTES.

Why wilt not thou partake it ?
 Then shou'd I bid adieu to all my fears :
 The altar waits, prepar'd for Merope
 And Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Thou hast gain'd the throne,
 The gods have giv'n it thee, and now thou want'st
 Cresphontes' wife to make his kingdom sure.
 This crime alone —

ISMENIA.

O stop —

MEROPE.

Mylord, forgive me;

I am a wretched mother; I have lost
 My all; the gods, the cruel gods have robb'd me
 Of ev'ry bliss: O give me, give me back
 The murth'rer of my son!

POLIPHONTES.

This hand shall shed
 The traitors blood: come, madam, follow me.

MEROPE.

O gracious heav'n! in pity to my woes,
 Preserve a mother, and conceal her weakness!

END of the THIRD ACT.

A C T I V. S C E N E I.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

POLIPHONTES.

I ALMOST thought she had discover'd something
 Touching her husband's murther, for she frown'd
 Indignant on me; but I want her hand,

And not her heart ; the croud will have it so ;
 We must not disoblige them ; by this marriage
 I shall secure them both : I look on her
 But as a slave that's useful to my purpose,
 Chain'd to my chariot wheels to grace my triumph,
 And little heed her hatred or her love.
 But thou haft talk'd to this young murtherer,
 What think'st thou of him ?

EROX.

He's immoveable,
 Simple in speech, but of undaunted courage,
 He braves his fate : I little thought to find
 In one of his low birth a soul so great ;
 I own, my lord, I cannot but admire him.

POLIPHONTES.

Who is he ?

EROX.

That I know not ; but most certain
 He is not one of those whom we employ'd
 To watch for Narbas.

POLIPHONTES.

Art thou sure of that ?

The leader of that band I have myself
 Dispatch'd, and prudent bury'd in his blood
 The dang'rous secret ; but this young unknown

Alarms

Alarms me: is it certain he destroy'd
 Ægisthus? has propitious fate, that still
 Prevented all my wishes, been thus kind?

EROX,

Merope's tears, her sorrow, and despair,
 Are the best proofs; but all I see confirms
 Thy happiness, and fortune hath done more
 Than all our cares.

POLIPHONTES.

Fortune doth often reach
 What wisdom cannot: but I know too well
 My danger, and the number of my foes,
 To leave that fortune to decide my fate:
 Whoe'er this stranger be, he must not live,
 His death shall purchase me this haughty queen,
 And make the crown sit firmer on my head.
 The people then, subjected to my pow'r,
 Will think at least their prince is dead, and know
 That I reveng'd him: but, inform me, who
 Is this old man that shuns me thus? there seems
 Some myst'ry in his conduct; Merope,
 Thou tell'st me, wou'd have slain the murtherer,
 But that this old man did prevent her; what
 Cou'd move him to it?

EROX.

He's the young man's father,
And came t'implore his pardon.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha ! his pardon !
I'll see, and talk with him ; but he avoids me,
And therefore I suspect him ; but I'll know
This secret : what cou'd be the queen's strange pur-
pose,
In thus deferring what so ardently
She seem'd to wish for ? all her rage was chang'd
To tend'rest pity ; through her griefs methought
A ray of joy broke forth.

EROX.

What is her joy,
Her pity, or her vengeance, now to thee ?

POLIPHONTES.

It doth concern me nearly ; I have cause
For many fears ; but she approaches : — bring
That stranger to me.

S C E N E

S C E N E II.

POLIPHONTES, EROX, ÆGISTHUS, EURICLES,
MEROPE, ISMENIA, Guards.

MEROPE.

Fulfil your word, sir, and revenge me ; give
The victim to my hands, and mine alone.

POLIPHONTES.

You see I mean to keep it : he's before you :
Revenge yourself, and shed the traitors blood ;
Then, madam, with your leave, we'll to the altar.

MEROPE.

O gods !

ÆGISTHUS. [To Poliphontes.

Am I then to be made the purchase
Of the queen's favour ? my poor life indeed
Is but of little moment, and I die
Contented ; but I am a stranger here,
A helpless, innocent, unhappy stranger ;
If heav'n has made thee king, thou shoud'st protect me :
I've slain a man, 'twas in my own defence ;
The queen demands my life ; she is a mother,
Therefore I pity her, and bless the hand
Rais'd to destroy me : I accuse none here
But thee, thou tyrant.

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

Hence, abandon'd villain ;
 Dar'st thou insult —

MEROPE.

O pardon his rash youth,
 Brought up in solitude, and far remov'd
 From courts, he knows not the respect that's due
 To majesty.

POLIPHONTES.

Amazing ! justify'd
 By you !

MEROPE.

By me, my lord ?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, you.
 Is this the murth'rer of your son ?

MEROPE.

My child,
 My son, the last of a long line of kings,
 Beneath a vile assassin's hand —

ISMENIA.

O heav'n !
 What woud'st thou do ?

POLIPHONTES.

Thy eyes are fix'd upon him
 With tenderness and joy ; thy tears too flow,
 Though thou woud'st hide them from me.

M E R O P E.

MEROPE.

No: 'tis false:

I wou'd not, cannot hide them: well thou know'it
 I've too much cause to weep.

POLIPHONTES.

Dry up your tears;

He dies this moment: soldiers, do your office.

MEROPE.

[Coming forward,

O spare him, spare him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ha! she pity's me.

POLIPHONTES.

Dispatch him.

MEROPE.

O he is —

POLIPHONTES.

Strike.

MEROPE.

Stay, barbarian,

He is — my son.

ÆGISTHUS.

Am I thy son?

MEROPE.

[Embracing him.

Thou art:

And heav'n, that snatch'd thee from this wretched bo-
 som,

Which

Which now too late hath open'd my longing eyes,
Restores thee to a weeping mother's arms
But to destroy us both.

ÆGISTHUS.

What miracle
Is this, ye gods?

POLIPHONTES.

A vile imposture: thou
His mother? thou, who did'st demand his death?

ÆGISTHUS.

O if I die the son of Merope
I die contented, and absolve my fate.

MEROPE.

I am thy mother, and my love of thee
Betray'd us both; we are undone, Ægisthus;
Yes, Poliphontes, the important secret
At length is thine; before thee stands my son,
Cresphontes' heir; thy master, and thy king;
The offspring of the gods, thy captive now;
I have deceiv'd thee, and I glory in it;
'Twas for my child: but nature has no pow'r
O'er tyrant's hearts, that still rejoice in blood:
I tell thee, 'tis my son, 'tis my Ægisthus.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! can it be?

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

It is ; it must be so ;

Her tears confirm it : yes, I am the son
Of Merope, my heart assures me of it :
And, had'st thou not disarm'd me, with this hand
I wou'd chastise thee, traitor.

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis too much ;

I'll bear no more : away with him.

MEROPE. [Falling on her knees.

Behold

Thus low on earth the wretched Merope
Falls at your feet, and bathes them with her tears :
Doth not this humble posture speak my griefs,
And say I am a mother ? O I tremble
When I look back on the dire precipice
I have escap'd, the murther of my son ;
Still I lament th' involuntary crime.
Did'st thou not say thou woud'st protect his youth,
And be a father to him ? and yet now
Thou woud'st destroy him : O have pity on him :
Some guilty hand bereav'd him of a father ;
O save the son, defend the royal race,
The seed of gods : defenceless and alone
He stands before thee : trample not on him,
Who is unable to resist thy pow'r ;

Let

Let him but live, and I am satisfy'd ;
 Save but my child, and all shall be forgotten :
 O he wou'd make me happy ev'n in woe ;
 My husband and my children all wou'd live
 Once more in my *Æ*gisthus : O behold
 His royal ancestors with me implore thee
 To spare the noble youth, and save thy king.

*Æ*GIS THUS.

Rise, madam, rise, or I shall ne'er believe
 Cresphontes was my father ; 'tis beneath
 His queen, beneath the mother of *Æ*gisthus,
 To supplicate a tyrant ; my fierce heart
 Will never stoop so low : undaunted long
 I braved the meanness of my former fortune,
 Nor am I dazzled by the splendid lustre
 Of these new honours ; but I feel myself
 Of royal blood, and know I am thy son.
 Great Hercules, like me, began his days
 In misery and sorrow ; but the gods
 Conducted him to immortality,
 Because, like me, he rose superior to them :
 To me his blood descends ; O let me add
 His courage, and his virtues ; let me die
 Worthy of thee ; be that my heritage !

Cease then thy pray'rs, nor thus disgrace the blood
Of those immortal pow'rs from whom I sprang.

POLIPHONTES. [To Merope.

Trust me, I bear a part in your misfortunes,
Feel for your griefs, and pity your distress ;
I love his courage, and esteem his virtue ;
He seems well worthy of the royal birth
Which he assumes ; but truths of such importance
Demand more ample proofs ; I take him therefore
Beneath my care, and, if he is thy son,
I shall adopt him mine.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou, thou adopt me ?

MEROPE.

Alas ! my child !

POLIPHONTES.

His fate depends on thee :

It is not long since, to secure his death,
Thou did'st consent to marry Poliphontes ;
Now thou woud'st save him, shall not love do more
Than vengeance ?

MEROPE.

Ha ! barbarian !

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

Madam, know

His life, or death, depends on thy reslove :
 I know your love, your tendernes, too well,
 To think you will expose to my just wrath
 So dear an object by a harsh refusal.

MEROPE.

My lord, at least let him be free, and deign —

POLIPHONTES.

He is your son, or he's a traitor, madam ;
 I must be your's before I can protect him,
 Or be reveng'd on both ; a word from you
 Decides his fate, or punishment, or pardon ;
 Or as his mother I shall look upon you
 Or his accomplice ; therefore make your choice :
 I will receive your answser at the temple
 Before th'attesting gods.

[To the soldiers.

Guard well your pris'ner :
 Come, follow me :

[Turning to Merope.

I shall expect you, madam ;
 Be quick in your reslove ; confirm his birth
 By giving me your hand ; your answser only
 Saves or condems him ; and as you determine
 He is my victim, madam, or — my son.

M E R O P E.

MEROPE.

O grant me but the pleasure to behold him ;
Restore him to my love, to my despair.

POLIPHONTES.

You'll see him at the temple.

ÆGISTHUS. [As the guards are carrying him off.

O great queen,

I dare not call thee by the sacred name
Of mother, do not, I beseech thee, aught
Unworthy of thyself, or of Ægisthus ;
For, if I am thy son, thy son shall die
As a king ought.

S C E N E III.

MEROPE. [Alone.

Ye cruel spoilers, why

Will you thus tear him from me ? O he's gone,
I've lost him now for ever ; wherefore, heav'n,
Didst thou restore him to a mother's vows,
Or why preserve him in a foreign land,
To fall at last a wretched sacrifice,
A victim to the murth'rer of his father ?
O save him, hide him in the desart's gloom ;
Direct his steps, and shield him from the tyrant !

S C E N E

S C E N E IV.

MEROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES.

MEROPE.

O Narbas, know'st thou the unhappy fate
 Which I am doom'd to ?

N A R B A S.

Well I know the king
 Must die ; I know \mathbb{A} egisthus is in chains.

MEROPE.

And I destroy'd him.

N A R B A S.

You ?

M E R O P E.

Discover'd all :

But think'st thou, Narbas, ever mother yet
 Cou'd see a child, as I did, and be silent ?
 But it is past : and now I must repair
 My weakness with my crimes.

N A R B A S.

What crimes ?

S C E N E V.

MEROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

Now call forth all the vigour of your soul,

O madam,

The

The hour of trial comes: the fickle crowd,
 Still fond of novelty, with ardent zeal,
 Press forward to behold th'expected nuptials;
 Each circumstance conspires to serve the tyrant:
 Already the bribed priest has made his god
 Declare for Poliphontes: he receiv'd.
 Your vows, Messene was a witness to them,
 And heav'n will see the contract is fulfill'd:
 Thus spoke the holy seer; the people answer'd
 With acclamations loud, and songs of joy;
 They little know the grief that wrings thy heart;
 But thank the gods for these detested nuptials,
 And bless the tyrant for his cruelty.

M E R O P E.

And are my sorrows made the public joy?

N A R B A S.

O these are dreadful means to save thy son.

M E R O P E.

They are indeed: thou shudder'st at the thought:
 It is a crime.

N A R B A S.

But to destroy thy child

Were still more horrible.

M E R O P E.

Away: despair

Has giv'n me courage, and restor'd my virtue:

Let's

Let's to the temple ; there I'll shew the people
 My dear *Ægishus* ; 'twixt myself and th' altar
 Will place my son ; the gods will see him there ;
 They will defend him, for from them he sprang :
 Too long already persecuting heav'n
 Hath scourg'd his helpless innocence ; and now
 It will avenge him : O I will set forth
 His savage murth'rer in the blackest colours,
 Till vengeance shall inspire each honest heart
 With tenfold rage : now dread a mother's cries,
 Ye cruel tyrants, for they will be heard :
 They come ; alas ! I tremble yet, despair
 And horror seize me : hark, they call, my son
 Is dying : see the cruel murth'rer plants
 A dagger in his breast : a moment more
 And he is lost : ye savage ministers

[Turning to the sacrificers.

Of the base tyrant, you must drag the victim
 Up to the altar ; can you, must you do it ?
 O vengeance, duty, tenderness, and love,
 And thou great nature, what will ye ordain,
 What will ye do with an unhappy queen,
 Abandon'd to despair ?

END of the FOURTH ACT.

A C T

A C T V. S C E N E I.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

NARBAS.

OUR fate is yet uncertain, whilst the tyrant
 Still keeps us in the palace; all my fears
 Are for Ægisthus: O my king, my son,
 Let me still call thee by that tender name,
 O live, disarm the tyrant's rage, preserve
 A life so dear, so precious to Messene,
 So valued by thy faithful Narbas!

EURICLES.

Think

On the poor queen, who, for thy sake alone
 An humble suppliant, sprinkles with her tears
 The tyrant's murth'rous hand.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'm scarce awaken'd

From my long dream, I seem as one new-born;
 A wand'ring stranger in a world unknown;
 New thoughts inspire, new day breaks in upon me;
 The son of Merope, and great Cresphontes;
 And yet his murth'rer triumphs; he commands,
 And I obey; the blood of Hercules
 A captive and in chains!

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

O wou'd to heav'n
The grandson of Alcides still remain'd
Unknown in Elis !

ÆGISTHUS.

Is it not most strange,
Young as I am, that I shou'd know already,
By sad experience, ev'ry human woe ?
Horror and shame, and banishment, and death,
Since my first dawn of life, have press'd upon me :
A persecuted wretch I wander'd long
From clime to clime, hid in the desert's gloom,
I languish'd there in vile obscurity :
Yet, bear me witness heav'n, mid'st all my woes,
Nor murmur'd nor complain'd : tho' proud ambition
Devour'd my soul, I learn'd the humble virtues
That suited best my hard and low condition :
Still I respected, still obey'd thee, Narbas,
And lov'd thee as a father ; nor wou'd e'er
Have wish'd to find another, but high heav'n
Wou'd change my fate to make me but more wretched :
I am Cresphontes' son, yet can't revenge him ;
I've found a mother, and a tyrant now
Will snatch her from me ; soon she must be his :
O I cou'd curse the hour that gave me birth,
And the kind succour which thy goodness lent me :

O why didst thou hold back th'uplifted hand
 Of a mistaken mother? But for thee
 I had fulfill'd my fate, and all my woes
 Had ended with my life.

NARBAS.

We are undone,

The tyrant comes.

SCENE II.

POLIPHONTES, AEGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES,
 Guards.

POLIPHONTES.

[To Narbas and the rest.

Retire: and thou, rash youth,
 Whose tender years demand my pity, lift,
 And mark me well; for the last time I come
 To give thee here thy choice of life or death,
 Thy present and thy future happiness,
 Thy very being hangs upon my will:
 I can advance thee to the highest rank,
 Or shut thee in a dungeon, kill or save thee:
 Remov'd from courts, and bred in solitude,
 Thou art not fit to govern; let me guide
 In wisdom's ways thy unexperience'd youth;
 Assume not in thy humble state a pride
 Which thou mistak'st for virtue: if thy birth

Be mean and lowly, bend to thy condition ;
 If happier fate hath giv'n thee to descend
 From royal blood, and thou wert born a prince,
 Make thyself worthy of thy noble rank,
 And learn of me to rule : the queen, thou see'st,
 Has set thee an example ; she obeys,
 And meets me at the temple ; follow her,
 Tread in my steps, attend us to the altar,
 And swear eternal homage to thy king,
 To Poliphontes : if thou fear'st the gods,
 Call them to witness thy obedience ; haste,
 The gates of glory open to receive,
 And not to enter may be fatal to thee :
 Determine therefore now, and answer me.

ÆGISTHUS.

How can I answer when thou hast disarm'd me ?
 Thy words, I own, astonish and confound ;
 But give me back that weapon which thy fears
 Have wrested from me ; give me my good sword,
 And I will answer as I ought ; will shew thee,
 Perfidious as thou art, which is the slave,
 And which the master, whether Poliphontes
 Was born to rule o'er princes, or Ægisthus
 To scourge oppressors.

POLIPHONTES.

Impotence and rashness !

My kind indulgence makes thee insolent :
 Thou think'st I'll not demean myself so far
 To punish an unknown rebellious slave ;
 But mercy, thus abused, will change to wrath :
 I give thee but a moment to determine,
 And shall expect thee at the altar ; there
 To die or to obey : guards, bring him to me :
 Narbas, to you and Euricles I leave
 The haughty rebel ; you shall answer for him :
 I know your hatred of me, and I know
 Your weakness too, but trust to your experience,
 You will advise him for the best ; mean time
 Remember, whether he's the son of Narbas
 Or Merope, he must obey, or die.

S C E N E III.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'll listen to no counsel but the voice
 Of vengeance ; O inspire me, Hercules,
 O from thy seats of endless bliss look down
 On thy Ægisthus, animate his soul,

E 2

And

And guide his footsteps ! Poliphontes calls,
I will attend him ; let us to the altar.

NARBAS.

Wilt thou then die ?

EURICLES.

We must not follow thee :
Let us collect our few remaining friends,
And strive ———

ÆGISTHUS.

Away : another time my soul
Wou'd listen to your kind advice, for well
I know ye love me ; but no counsellors
Must now be heard save all-directing heav'n
And my own heart : th' irresolute alone
Is sway'd by others, but the blood of heroes
Will guide itself : away, the die is cast.
What do I see ? O gracious heav'n ! my mother !

S C E N E. IV.

MEROPE, ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES,
Attendants.

MEROPE.

Once more, Ægisthus, by the tyrant's order,
We meet together ; he has sent me to thee :
Think not that, after these detested nuptials,
I mean to live ; but for thy sake, my son,

I have submitted to this shameful bondage :
 For thee alone I fear ; for thee I bear
 This load of infamy : O live, *Ægisthus*,
 Let me intreat thee, live ; e'er thou can'st rule
 Thou must obey, and servitude must open
 The path to vengeance ; thou contemn'st my weak-
 nes,

I know thou dost ; but O the more I love
 The more I fear. O my dear child —

ÆGISTHUS.

Be bold,
 And follow me.

MEROPE.

Alas ! what woud'st thou do ?
 Why, ye just gods, why was he made too virtuous ?

ÆGISTHUS.

See'st thou my father's tomb ? dost thou not hear
 His voice ? art thou a mother and a queen ?
 O if thou art, come on.

MEROPE.

Methinks some god
 Inspires thy soul, and raises the above
 The race of mortals : now I see the blood
 Of great Alcides flows thro' ev'ry vein,
 And animates *Ægisthus* : O my son,

Give me a portion of thy noble fire,
And raise this drooping heart !

ÆGISTHUS.

Haft thou no friends
Within this fatal temple ?

MEROPE.

Once I had
A croud of followers when I was a queen,
But now their virtue sinks beneath the weight
Of my misfortunes, and they bend their necks
To this new yoke : they hate the tyrant, yet
Have crown'd him ; love their queen, and yet desert her.

ÆGISTHUS.

By all art thou abandon'd ; at the altar
Waits Poliphontes for thee ?

MEROPE.

Yes.

ÆGISTHUS.

His soldiers,

Do they attend him ?

MEROPE.

No : he is surrounded
By that ungrateful faithless croud that once
Encircled Merope, by them upled
To th' altar I will force for thee alone

A passage.

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

And alone I'll follow thee :

There shall I meet my ancestors divine :

The gods who punish murth'ers will be there.

MEROPE.

Alas ! these fifteen years they have contemn'd thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

They did it but to try me.

MEROPE.

What's thy purpose ?

ÆGISTHUS.

No matter what ; let us begone : farewell

My mournful friends, at least ye soon shall know

The son of Merope deserv'd your care.

[To Narbas, embracing him.

Narbas, believe me, thou shalt never blush

To own me for thy son.

S C E N E V.

NARBAS.

What means Ægisthus ?

Alas ! my cares are fruitless all and vain :

I hoped the sure slow-moving hand of time

Wou'd justify the ways of heav'n, and place

The wrong'd *Æ*gisthus on Messene's throne;
 But guilt still triumphs, and my hopes are vanish'd;
 His courage will destroy him; death awaits
 His disobedience.

[A noise within.]

EURICLES.

Hark! they shout.

NARBAS.

Alas!

It is the fatal signal.

EURICLES.

Let us listen.

NARBAS.

I tremble.

EURICLES.

Doubtless, at the very moment
 When Poliphontes was to wed the queen,
 She has dissolv'd the shameful bonds by death,
 For so her rage had purpos'd.

NARBAS.

Then *Æ*gisthus
 Must perish too, she shou'd have liv'd for him.

EURICLES.

The noise increases, like the rolling thunder
 Onward it comes, and ev'ry moment grows
 More dreadful.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

Hark ! I hear on ev'ry side
 The trumpets sound, the groans of dying men,
 And clash of swords ; they force the palace.

EURICLES.

See

Yon bloody squadron ; look, it is dispers'd ;
 They fly.

NARBAS.

Perhaps to serve the tyrant's cause.

EURICLES.

Far as my eyes can reach I see them still
 Engag'd in fight.

NARBAS.

Whose blood will there be shed ?
 Surely I heard the name of Merope,
 And of Ægisthus.

EURICLES.

Thanks to heav'n, the ways
 Are open, I will hence, and know my fate.

[He goes out.

NARBAS.

I'll follow thee, but not with equal steps,
 For I am old and feeble : O ye gods !
 Restore my strength, give to this nerveless arm
 Its former vigor ; let me save my king,

Or yield up the poor remnant of my days,
And die in his defence.

S C E N E VI.

NARBAS, ISMENIA. [A croud of people.
NARBAS.

Who's there? Ismenia?
Bloody and pale! O horrid spectacle!
Art thou indeed Ismenia?

ISMENIA.

O my voice,
My breath is lost; let me recover them,
And I will tell thee all.

NARBAS. My son—
The queen — do they yet live?

ISMENIA.

I'm scarce myself;
Half dead with fear; the croud have borne me hither.

NARBAS.
How does Ægisthus?

ISMENIA.
O he is indeed
The son of gods; a stroke so terrible,
So noble! never did th' unconquer'd courage

Of great Alcides with a deed so bold
Astonish mortals.

NARBAS.

O my son, my king,
The work of my own hands, the gallant hero!

ISMENIA.

Crown'd with fresh flow'rs the victim was prepar'd,
And Hymen's torches round the altar blaz'd,
When Poliphontes, wrapp'd in gloomy silence,
Stretch forth his eager hand; the priest pronounc'd
The solemn words; amidst her weeping maids
Stood fix'd in grief the wretched Merope;
Slow she advanc'd, and trembling in these arms,
Instead of Hymen, call'd on death; the people
Were silent all; when from the holy threshold,
A more than mortal form, a youthful hero
Stepp'd forth, and sudden darted to the altar;
It was Ægilithus; there undaunted seiz'd
The axe that for the holy scſtival
Had been prepar'd; then with the light'ning's speed
He ran, and fell'd the tyrant; die, he cry'd,
Usurper dye; now take your victim, gods.
Erox, the monster's vile accomplice, saw
His master welt'ring in his blood, uprais'd
His hand for vengeance; but Ægilithus smote.

The.

The slave, and laid him at the tyrant's feet :
Mean time, recover'd, Poliphontes rose
And fought ; I saw *Ægisthus* wounded ; saw
The fierce encounter : the guards ran to part them ;
When Merope, such pow'r has mighty love,
Pierc'd thro' opposing multitudes, and cry'd,
Stop, ye inhuman murth'lers, 'tis my son,
'Tis my *Ægisthus*, turn your rage on me,
And plant your daggers in the breast of her
Who bore him, of his mother, and your queen :
Her shrieks alarm'd the croud, and a firm band
Of faithful friends secur'd her from the rage
Of the rude soldiers ; then might you behold
The broken altars, and the sacred ruins :
On ev'ry side, confusion, war, and slaughter
Triumphant reign'd ; brothers on brothers rose,
Children were butcher'd in their mother arms,
Friends murther'd friends, the dying and the dead
Together lay, and o'er their bodies trampled
The flying croud ; with groans the temple rung.
Amidst the uproar of contending legions
I lost *Ægisthus* and the queen, and fled :
In vain I ask'd each passing stranger whither
They bent their way ; their answers but increase
My terrors ; still they cry, he falls, he's dead,

He conquers; all is darkness and confusion:
 I ran, I flew, and by the timely aid
 Of these kind friends have reach'd this place of safety:
 But still I know not whether yet the queen
 And great Ægisthus are preserv'd; my heart
 Is full of terrors.

NARBAS.

Thou great arbiter
 Of all that's mortal, providence divine,
 Complete thy glorious work, protect the good,
 Support the innocent, reward the wretched,
 Preserve my son, and I shall die in peace!
 Ha! midst yon croud do I behold the queen?

S C E N E VII.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, NARBAS, people, soldiers.

[At the further part of the stage is expos'd the Corpse of
 Poliphontes, cover'd with a bloody robe]

M E R O P E.

Priests, warriors, friends, my fellow-citizens,
 Attend, and hear me in the name of heav'n.
 Once more I swear, Ægisthus is your king,
 The scourge of guilt, th'avenger of his father,
 And yonder bleeding corpse, a hated monster,
 The foe of gods and men, who slew my husband,
 My dear Cresphontes, and his helpless children,

Oppres'd

Oppress'd Messene, and usurp'd my kingdom,
Yet dar'd to offer me his savage hand,
Still reeking with the blood of half my race.

[Meeting Ægisthus, who enters with the axe in his hand.
But here behold Messene's royal heir,
My only hope, your queen's illustrious son,
Who conquer'd Poliphontes : see, my friends,
This good old man,

[Pointing to Naubus.

Who sav'd him from the tyrant,
And brought him here : the gods have done the rest.

N A R B A S.

I call those gods to witness, 'tis your king ;
He fought for them, and they protected him.

ÆGISTHUS.

O hear a mother pleading for her son,
And know me for your king ! I have reveng'd
A father, I have conquer'd but for you.

M E R O P E.

If still ye doubt, look on his glorious wounds :
Who, but the great descendant of Alcides,
Cou'd save Messene thus, and scourge a tyrant ?
He will support his subjects, and revenge

An

An injur'd people: hark! the voice of heav'n
 Confirms your choice, and speaks to you in thunder;
 It cries aloud, *Ægisthus* is my son.

S C E N E VIII.

MEROPE, *ÆGISTHUS*, ISMENIA, NARBAS,
 EURICLES, people.

EURICLES.

O madam, shew yourself to the pleas'd people,
 The king's return has fix'd their wav'ring minds,
 And ev'ry heart is ours: th' impatient croud
 Shed tears of joy, and bless your noble son:
 For ever will they hold this glorious day
 In sweet remembrance; ardently they long
 To see their youthful sov'reign, to behold
 His faithful Narbas, and adore their queen:
 The name of Poliphontes is detested;
 Thine and the king's the praise of ev'ry tongue.
 O haste, enjoy thy vi&ct'ry and thy fame;
 Enjoy a nobler prize, thy people's love.

ÆGISTHUS.

To heav'n ascribe the glory, not to me;
 Thence comes our happiness, and thence our virtue;
 Whilst Merope survives, I will not mount

Meffene's

Messene's throne, my joy shall be to place
A mother there; and thou, my dearest Narbas,
Shall be my friend, my guide, my father still.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.



N A N I N E

A

C O M E D Y.

In three Acts.



P R E F A C E.

THIS trifle was exhibited in the summer, 1749, at Paris, amongst a number of entertainments which every year constantly produces in that city: in the still more numerous croud of pamphlets, which the town is over-run with, there appear'd at this time one extremely well worthy of notice, an ingenious and learned dissertation, by a member of the academy of Rochelle, on a question which seems for some years past to have divided the literary world, namely, whether we ought to write *serious comedies*? the author declares vehemently against this new species of the drama, to which, I am afraid, the little comedy of *Nanine* belongs: he condemns, and with reason, every thing that carries with it the air of a *city tragedy*: in reality, what can be more ridiculous, than a tragic plot carry'd on by low and vulgar characters? it is demeaning the buskin, and confounding tragedy and comedy

comedy, by a kind of bastard species, a monster, that cou'd only owe its birth to an incapacity of succeding either in one or the other: this judicious writer blames, above all, those romantic forc'd intrigues which are to draw tears from the spectators, and which we call, by way of ridicule, the *crying comedy*: but into what species of comedy ought such intrigues to be admitted? wou'd they not be look'd upon as essential and unpardonable faults in any performance whatsoever? He concludes by observing, that if, in a comedy, pity may sometimes go so far as to melt into tears, they shou'd be shed by love alone: he cannot certainly mean by this the passion of love as it is represented in our best tragedies, furious, barbarous, destructive, attended with guilt and remorse; but love gentle and tender, which alone is fit for comedy.

This reflection naturally produces another, which I shall submit to the judgment of the learned; *viz.* that amongst us tragedy has begun by appropriating to itself the language of comedy; we may observe, that love, in many of those performances where terror and pity shou'd be the chief springs, is treated as it ought to be treated in comedy. Gallantry, declarations of love, coquetry, archness and familiarity, are all to be met with amongst the heroes and heroines of Greece and Rome,

Rome, with which our tragedies abound : so that, in effect, the natural and tender love in our comedies is not stol'n from the tragic muse ; it is not *Thalia* who has committed a theft upon *Melpomene*, but, on the other hand, *Melpomene*, who for a long time has worn the buskins of *Thalia*.

If we cast our eyes on the first tragedies that had such amazing success in the time of Cardinal *Richelieu*, the *Sophonisba* of *Mairet*, *Mariamne*, *Tyrannic Love*, and *Alcyone*, we shall remark that love, in every one of them, talks in a stile quite familiar, and sometimes extremely low ; no less ridiculous than the pompous tone and emphasis of their heroism : this is perhaps the reason why, at that time, we had not one tolerable comedy, because the tragic scene had stole away all its rights and privileges : it is even probable, that this determin'd *Moliere* seldom to bestow upon his lovers any strong lively and interesting passion for each other : tragedy, he perceiv'd, had anticipated him in this particular.

From the time when the *Sophonisba* of *Mairet* appear'd, which was our first regular tragedy, we began to consider the declarations of love from our heroes, and the artful and coquetish replies of our heroines, together with strong pictures of love and gallantry, as things

things essentially necessary to the tragic scene: there are writings of those times still extant which quote the following verses, spoken by *Massinissa* after the battle of Cirte, not without great Eulogiums on their extraordinary merit.

By mutual flames I find my flame approv'd,
 And love the more, the more I am belov'd;
 Sighs grow by sighs, and wishes wishes form,
 As waves by waves are lash'd into a storm;
 When two fond hearts indulgent Hymen chains,
 Alike shou'd be their pleasures and their pains.

The custom of talking thus about love corrupted even some of our best writers; even those, whose manly and sublime geniuses were made to restore tragedy to its ancient splendor, cou'd not escape the contagion: in some of our finest pieces we meet with, “* *an unhappy face, that subdued the courage of a Roman knight.*” The lover says to his mistress, “† *Adieu, thou too virtuous, and too charming object.*” To which the

* —————— un malheureux visage,
 Qui d'un Chevalier Romain captiva le courage.
 † Adieu, trop vertueux objet, & trop charmant.

Heroine replies, adieu “*thou too unhappy and too perfect lover.” Cleopatra tells us, that a princess, “† who loves her reputation, if she owns her love, is sure to be belov’d.” And that Cæsar “‡ sighs, and in a plaintive tone acknowledges himself her captive, even in the field of victory :”, adding, that she alone must be cruel, and make Cæsar unhappy. To which her confidante replies, “§ I wou’d venture to swear that your charms boast a power which they will never make use of.”

In all those pieces of the same author, which were written after his *Death of Pompey*, we are sorry to find the passion of love always treated in this familiar manner ; but, without taking the unnecessary trouble of producing more examples of these glaring absurdities, let us only consider some of the best verses which the author of *Cinna* has brought on the stage as maxims of

* Adieu, trop malheureux, & trop parfait amant.

† ————— aimant sa renommee
En avouant qu'elle aime est sûre d'etre aimée.

‡ ————— trace des soupirs, & du'n stile plaintif,
Dans son champ de victoire il sedit son captif.

§ T'oserois bien jurer que vos charmans appas
Se vantent d'un pouvoir dont ils n'ufront pas.

I have here given the original of these few short quotations, that the reader may see the full force, both of the absurdity, and of Mr. Voltaire's ridicule of it.

gallantry.

gallantry. “ *There are certain secret ties, and sympathetic feelings, by whose soft affinity souls are link'd together, attach'd to, and struck by each other by I know not what charm, which it is impossible to account for.*” Wou’d one ever conceive that these sentiments, which are certainly highly comic, came out of the mouth of a princess of *Parthia*, who goes to her lover to ask her mother’s life? In such a dreadful crisis, who wou’d talk of the *sympathetic feelings by whose soft affinity souls are link’d together?* Wou’d *Sophocles* ever have produced such madrigals? do not all these amorous sentiments belong to comedy only?

That great writer, who has carry’d the harmony of verse to such a point of perfection, he who made love speak a language at once so noble and so pathetic, has, notwithstanding, brought into his tragedies several scenes which *Boileau* thought much more proper for the elevated stile of *Terence’s* comedies, than suitable to the dignity of the great rival of *Euripides*, who is even sometimes superior to him. One might quote above an hundred verses in this taste; not but that this familiar simplicity has its beauties, and may serve by way of preparation for the pathetic; but if these strokes of simplicity belong even to the tragic muse, with still more reason do they suit high comedy: this is the ex-

act point where tragedy descends, and comedy raises itself; where the two arts meet, as it were, and touch each other: here their several limits are confounded: and if *Orestes* and *Hermione* are permitted to say,

‘ O do not wish for the fate of *Pyrrhus*, I should
 ‘ hate you too much—you wou’d love me still more :
 ‘ O that you wou’d look on me in another manner !
 ‘ you wish to love me, and yet I cannot please you :
 ‘ you wou’d love me, madam, by wishing me to hate
 ‘ —for, in short, he hates you; his heart is other-
 ‘ wife engaged; he has no longer——

‘ Who told you, my lord, that he despises me ? do
 ‘ you think the sight of me inspires contempt ?

If these heroes, I say, express themselves in this familiar manner, with how much greater reason shou’d we admire the *Misanthrope* speaking thus with vehemence to his mistress ?

“ Rather blush you, for so you ought, I have too
 “ sure testimony of your falsehood—it was not in vain
 “ that my love was alarm’d, but think not I will tamely
 “ bear the injury without being reveng’d—’tis a trea-
 “ son, a perfidy which cannot be too severely punished ;
 “ yes, I will give a loose to my resentment, I am no
 “ longer master of myself, passion intirely posses-

‘ me: mortally wounded as I am by you, my senses
 ‘ are no longer under the government of reason.’

Certainly, if all the *Misanthrope* was in this taste, it wou’d no longer be a comedy; and if *Orestes* and *Hermione* talk’d throughout in the manner they do in the lines above quoted, it wou’d be no tragedy: but after these two very different species met thus together, they fall back each into their proper sphere; one resumes the pleasant stile, and the other the sublime.

Comedy therefore, I repeat it once more, may be impulsion’d, may be in transport, or in tears, provided at the same time that it makes the good and virtuous smile: but if it was intirely destitute of the *vis comica*, if, from beginning to end, it had nothing in it but the serious and melancholy, it wou’d then be a species of writing very faulty, and very disagreeable. It must be acknowledg’d, that there is no small difficulty in making the spectators pass insensibly from tears to laughter, and yet this transition, hard as it is to manage in a comedy, is not the less natural. We have already remark’d in another place, that nothing is more common than accidents that afflict the mind, some certain circumstances of which may, notwithstanding, excite at least a momentary mirth and gayety: thus, unhappily for us, is human nature

nature framed. *Hemer* representes even his gods laughing at *Vulcan's* aukwardnes, whilst they are deciding the fate of the whole universe. *Hector* smiles at the fears of his son *Astyanax*, whilst *Andromache* is shedding tears. We often see, that even amidst the horror of battles, conflagrations, and all the disafiers that mortals are subject to, a good thing, luckily hit off, will raise a laugh, even in the bosom of terror and pity. In the battle of *Spires*, a regiment was forbid to give quarter, a german officer begg'd his life of one of ours, who answer'd him thus : “ *Sir, ask anything in the world else, but as to your life, I can't possibly grant it.* ” This dry and whimsical answer pass'd from one to another, and every body laugh'd in the midst of slaughter and destruction ; why therefore shou'd not laughter follow the most serious and affecting scenes in a comedy ? don't we sympathise with *Alcmena's* distress, and yet laugh with *Sofia* ? how ridiculous it is to dispute against experience ! if those who still conteif this matter loverhime better than reason, let them take the following verses.

O'er this strange world still reigns the tyrant love,
And all by turns his powerful influence prove ;
Sometimes a mighty empire he o'erthrows,
Now soars in lofty verse, now creeps in prose ;

Sometimes in tragic garb his passion mourns,
Sometimes the humbler comic muse adorns:
Fire in his eyes, and arrows in his hand,
He spreads or pains or pleasures thro' the land:
In plaintive elegy his carols sweet
Now sings, now jocund laughs at *Sylvia's* feet:
For ever varying, and for ever new,
From *serious Maro* down to gay *Chaulieu*:
Bound by no laws, and to no verse confin'd,
He rules o'er every state, and ev'ry mind,
The universal idol of mankind.

NANINE.



N A N I N E.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

The Count d'OLBAN, a nobleman retir'd into the country.

The Baroness de l'ORME, a relation of the Count's, a haughty imperious woman, of a bad temper, and disagreeable to live with.

The Marchioness d'OLBAN, mother of the Count.

NANINE, a young girl, brought up in the Count's house.

PHILIP HOMBERT, a peasant in the neighbourhood.

BLAISE, the gardener.

GERMON, } Servants
MARIN, }

SCENE, the Count d'OLBAN's country seat.

NANINE.

*N A N I N E.

A

C O M E D Y.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Count d'OLBAN, the Baroness de L'ORME.

BARONESS.

IN short, my lord, it is time to come to an explanation with regard to this affair; we are no children, therefore let us talk freely: you have been a widower for these two years past, and I a widow about as long: the law-suit in which we were unfortunately engag'd,

* This Comedy is call'd in the French Nanine, ou le préjugé vaincu Nanine, or Prejudice overcome. It is written, as we are told in the title page, in verses of ten syllables. The absurdity of Comedies in rhyme I have already remark'd. The original begins thus :

Il faut parler, il faut, Monsieur le *Comte*,
Vous expliquer nettement sur mon *Compte*.

The reader cannot but observe, what villainous rhimes *Comte* and *Compte* are, and perhaps will more readily forgive my reducing this comedy into plain prose.

and which gave us both so much uneasiness, is at an end; and all our animosities, I hope, now bury'd with those who were the causes of them.

COUNT.

I am glad on't; for law-suits were always my aversion.

BARONESS.

And am not I as hateful as a law-suit?

COUNT.

You madam?

BARONESS.

Yes, I, sir: for these two years past we have liv'd together, with freedom, as relations and friends; the ties of blood, taste, and interest, seem to unite us, and to point out a more intimate connection.

COUNT.

Interest, madam? make use of some better term, I beseech you.

BARONESS.

That, sir, I cannot; but with grief I find, your inconstant heart no longer considers me in any other light than as your relation.

COUNT.

I do not wear the appearance, madam, of a trifler.

BARONESS.

You wear the appearance, sir, of a perjur'd villain.

COUNT.

COUNT.

[Aside.]

Ha! what's this?

BARONESS.

Yes, sir: you know the suit my husband began against you, to recover my estate, was, by agreement, to have been terminated by a marriage; a marriage you told me, of choice; you were engag'd to me, you know you are; and he who defers the execution of his promise seldom means to perform it.

COUNT.

You know, I wait for my mother's consent.

BARONESS.

A doting old woman: well, sir, and what then?

COUNT.

I love and respect her yet.

BARONESS.

But I do not, sir. Come, come, these are idle frivolous excuses for your unpardonable falsehood: you wait not for her, or for any body; perfidious, ungrateful man!

COUNT.

Who told you so, madam, and whence all this violence of passion? who told you so? whence comes your information, madam?

BARONESS.

Who told me? yourself, yourself. Your words, your manner, your air, your whole behaviour, put on on purpose to affront me: it shocks me to see it: act in another manner, or find some better excuses for your conduct: can you think me blind to the shameful unworthy passion that directs you, a passion for the lowest meanest object? you have deceiv'd me, sir, basely deceiv'd me.

COUNT.

'Tis false, I cannot deceive; dissimulation is no part of my character. I own to you, there was a time when you were agreeable to me, I admir'd you, and flatter'd myself that I shou'd have found in you a treasure to make amends for that which heaven had depriv'd me of; I hoped in this sweet asylum to have tasted the fruits of a peaceful and happy union: but you have found out the means to destroy your own power. Love, as I told you long since, has two quivers, one fill'd with darts, tipp'd with the purest flame, which inspires the soul with tender feelings, refines our taste, and sentiments, enlivens our affection, and enhances our pleasures: the other is full of cruel arrows, that wound our hearts with quarrels, jealousy, and suspicion, bring on coldness and indifference, and remove

the

the warmth of passion to make room for disgust and satiety: these, madam, are the darts which you have drawn forth, against us both, and yet you expect that I shou'd love.

BARONESS.

There, indeed, I own myself in the wrong: I ought not to expect it: it is not in your power: but you are false, and now wou'd reproach me for it, and I must suffer your insults, your fine similes and illustrations: but pray, sir, what is it I have done to lose this mighty treasure? what have you to find fault with?

COUNT.

Your temper, your humours, madam: beauty pleases the eye alone, softness and complacency charm the soul.

BARONESS.

And have not you your humours too, sir?

COUNT.

Doubtless, madam; and, for that very reason, wou'd have an indulgent wife; one whose sweet complying goodness wou'd bend a little to my frailties, and condescend to reconcile me to myself; to heal my wounds without burning them, to correct without assuming, to govern without being a tyrant, to insinuate herself by degrees into my heart, as the light

of a fine day opens gradually on the weak and delicate eye : he who feels the yoke that is put on him will always murmur at it ; and tyrannic love is a deity whom I abjure : I wou'd be a lover, but not a slave : your pride, madam, wou'd make me contemptible : I have faults, I own I have ; but heaven made woman to correct the leaven of our souls, to soften our afflictions, sweeten our bad humours, sooth our passions, and make us better and happier beings : this was what they were design'd for ; and, for my part, I wou'd prefer ugliness and affability to beauty with pride and arrogance.

BARONESS.

Excellently well moralis'd, indeed ; and so when you insult, abuse, and betray me, I in return, with mean complacency, must forgive the shameful extravagance of your passion ; and your assum'd air of grandeur and magnanimity must be a sufficient excuse to me for all the baseness of your heart.

COUNT.

How, madam ?

BARONESS.

Yes, sir : I know you : it is the young Nanine who has done me this injury ; a child, a servant, a field beggar, whom my foolish tenderness nourish'd and supported ;

ported ; whom your fond easy mother, touch'd with false pity, took up out of the bosom of penury and sorrow. O you blush, sir, do you ?

COUNT.

I, madam ? I wish her well.

BARONESS.

You love her, sir : I know you do.

COUNT.

Well, madam, and if I did love her, know, I wou'd openly avow it.

BARONESS.

Nay, I believe you are capable of it.

COUNT.

I am so.

BARONESS.

And wou'd you break thus through all the bounds of decency, degrade your rank, demean your birth, and, plung'd as you are in shame and infamy, laugh at and defy all honour ?

COUNT.

Call it prejudice : whatever you, or the world may think, madam, I never mistake vanity for honour and glory : you love pomp and splendor, and place
grandeur

grandeur and nobility in a coat of arms: I look for it in the heart. The man of worth, who has modesty with courage, and the woman who has sense and spirit, tho' without fortune, rank, or title, are, in my eyes, the first of human kind.

BARONESS.

But sure they ought to have some rank and condition in life. Wou'd you treat a low born scholar, or an honest man of the meanest birth, because he had a little virtue, in the same manner, and with the same respect, as your wou'd a lord?

COUNT.

The virtuous shou'd always have the preference.

BARONESS.

This extravagant humility is insupportable: do we owe nothing then to our rank?

COUNT.

Yes: to be honest.

BARONESS.

My noble blood wou'd aspire to a higher character.

COUNT.

That is a high one, which defies the vulgar.

BARO-

BARONESS.

Thus you degrade all quality.

COUNT.

No: thus I do honour to humanity.

BARONESS.

Ridiculous! what then becomes of the world? what is fashion?

COUNT.

Fashion, madam, is despis'd by wisdom: I will obey its ridiculous commands in my dress perhaps, but not in my sentiments: No: it becomes a man to act like a man, to preserve to himself his own taste and his own thoughts: am I ridiculously to ask of others what I am to seek, or to avoid, to praise, or condemn? must the world decide my fate? surely I have my reason, and that shou'd be my guide: apes were made for imitation only, but man shou'd act from his own heart.

BARONESS.

Why, this to be sure is freedom of sentiment, and talking like a philosopher. Go then, thou noble and sublime soul, go, and fall in love with village damsels, be the happy rival of ploughmen and hedgers: go, and support the honour of your race.

COUNT.

Good heaven! what must I do? How am I to act?

S C E N E

SCENE II.

The COUNT, the BARONESS, BLAISE.

COUNT.

Well, sir, what do you want?

BLAISE.

Your poor gardener, sir, humbly beseeches your honour —

COUNT.

My honour! well, Blaife, and what wou'd it thou have of my honour?

BLAISE.

An please your honour, I wou'd fain—be marry'd and —

COUNT.

With all my heart, Blaife, you have my consent; I like your design, and will assist you: I love folks shou'd marry. Well, and thy spouse elect, Blaife, what! is she? handsome?

BLAISE.

O yes, sir, a delicate little morsel.

BARONESS.

And does she like you, Blaife?

BLAISE.

O yes.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Well, and her name is?

BLAISE.

Yes, 'tis——

COUNT.

What?

BLAISE.

The pretty Nanine.

COUNT.

Nanine?

BARONESS.

Well, very well indeed! I approve of the match
extremely.

COUNT.

[Aside.]

O heav'n! how am I sunk! it cannot, must not be.

BLAISE.

I's sure, maister will like it.

COUNT.

What! did you say she lov'd you, rascal?

BLAISE.

I beg pardon, sir, I——

COUNT.

Did she tell you that she lov'd you, sir?

BLAISE.

BLAISE.

Why, no, sir, not absolutely, sir; not directly; but she seem'd to have a little sort of a sneaking kindness for me too: a hundred times has she said to me in the prettiest, softest, most familiar tone, 'help me, my dear friend, Blaise, to make a fine nosegay for my lord, that best of masters;' then wou'd she make the nosegay with such a pretty air, and look so thoughtful, and so absent, and so confused, and so——O it was plain enough.

COUNT.

[Aside.]

— Away, Blaise, get thee gone——O! and am I agreeable to her then?

BLAISE.

Nay, master, now don't put off this little affair of mine.

COUNT.

Ha!

BLAISE.

You shall see how this little spot of land will thrive under our hands soon: why won't you answer me, sir?

You say nothing.

COUNT.

[Aside.]

O! my heart is too full: I must retire——madam, your servant.

S C E N E

SCENE III.

The BARONESS, BLAISE.

BARONESS. [To herself.

He loves her to distraction, that I'm positive of: by what charms, by what happy address, cou'd she thus steal his heart from me? Nanine! good heav'n! what a choice! what madness! Nanine! no! I shall burst with disappointment.

BLAISE.

What did you say, madam, about Nanine?

BARONESS. [To herself.

Insolent creature!

BLAISE.

Is not Nanine a charming girl?

BARONESS.

No.

BLAISE.

Well, I say no more; but do, speak for me, speak for poor Blaife.

BARONESS.

What a dreadful stroke is this!

BLAISE.

I have a little money, madam, a few crowns: my father left me three good acres of land, and they shall be hers;

hers ; money, and land, every thing I have, body and foul, Blaife and all.

BARONESS.

Believe me, Blaife, I wish you as well as you can wish yourself, and shou'd be glad to serve you : I shou'd be glad to see you marry'd this very night : nay, what's more, I'll give her a portion.

BLAISE.

O good dear barones ! how I do love you ! is it possible you can make me so happy ?

BARONESS.

Alas ! Blaife, I am afraid I cannot ; we shall never succeed.

BLAISE.

O but you must, madam.

BARONESS.

I wish to God she was your wife : wait for my orders.

BLAISE.

And must I wait ? not long I hope.

BARONESS.

Be gone.

BLAISE.

Servant, madam : I shall have her, I shall have her.

SCENE IV.

The BARONESS.

[Alone.]

What a strange adventure! cou'd I have receiv'd a more cruel injury? a more shameful affront? the Count d' Olban rivall'd by a gardener — here, boy, *[she calls out to her servant]* fetch Nanine to me: since I am so unhappy, I must examine her: where cou'd she have learn'd this art of flattery? who taught her to gain hearts, and to preserve them, to light up a strong and a lasting flame? where? doubtless, in her eyes, in plain and simple nature: but this shameful and unworthy passion of his is still a secret; it has not dared as yet to appear openly. D' Olban, I see, has his scruples about it: so much the worse; if he had none, I might still have hopes; but he has all the symptoms of true love: O! here she comes, the sight of her hurts me; nature is most unjust, to bestow so much beauty on such a creature; 'tis an affront to nobility: come this way, madam.

SCENE V.

The BARONESS, NANINE.

NANINE.

Madam.

BARO-

BARONESS.

And yet, after all, she is not so very handsome ; those great black eyes of her's express nothing ; but if they have said, I love ; ay, there's the danger : but I must— come this way, child.

NANINE.

I come, madam, as is my duty.

BARONESS.

Yes : but you make me wait a little for you ; pry thee, child, step on : how awkwardly she is made ! what a mein there is ! he was never made for such a creature as thee.

NANINE.

'Tis very true, madam : I assure you, I have often blush'd in secret when I look'd on these fine clothes : but they were your first present to me, the effect of that goodness which I shall ever acknowledge, and of that generous care with which you were pleas'd to honour me : you took a pride in dressing me : O, madam, remember how often you have protected me : believe me, madam, I am still the same : why shou'd you wish to humble a submissive heart, which can never forget itself ?

BARONESS.

Bring that couch nearer to me — O I am distracted : whence come you ? what have you been about ?

NANINE

NANINE.

Reading, madam.

BARONESS.

Reading what?

NANINE.

An English book that was given me.

BARONESS.

What's the subject of it?

NANINE.

'Tis extremely interesting : the author wou'd have us believe that we are all brethren, all born equal, and on a level with each other ; but 'tis an idle chimera, I can't reconcile myself to his doctrine.

BARONESS.

[Aside.]

She will soon, I suppose—what vanity ! [To Nanine] bring me my standish, and pen and ink.

NANINE.

Yes, madam.

BARONESS.

No; stay : give me something to drink.

NANINE.

What, madam ?

BARONESS.

Nothing : it's no matter : take my fan. — go and fetch my gloves—or — stay — it does not signify, you need

need not: come hither: take you care, I desire, never to think yourself handsome.

NANINE.

That, madam, is a lesson you have so often taught me, that if I had so much vanity, and self-love had such influence over my foolish heart, you wou'd soon have cured me of it.

BARONESS. [Aside.

Where can she have learn'd all this? how I hate her! beauty and wit together! 'tis intolerable — hark'ee, child, you know the tenderncs I had for you in your infancy.

NANINE.

Yes, madam, and I hope my youth will be honour'd with equal goodness from you.

BARONESS.

Be careful then to deserve it: it is my intention now, this very day, nay this very hour, to fix and establish your happiness; judge then whether I love you.

NANINE.

To fix my happiness?

BARONESS.

Yes: I will give you a portion: the husband I design for you is well-made, and every way worthy of you; a proper match for you in every particular, and the

the only one that at present cou'd suit you : you ought to thank me for the choice : in a word, 'tis Blaife the gardener.

NANINE.

Blaife, madam ?

BARONESS.

Yes : why that simpering ? do you hesitate a moment to consent ? my offers, madam, I wou'd have you to know, are commands ; obey, or expect my resentment.

NANINE.

But, madam —

BARONESS.

Let me have no *but*s, they offend me : a pretty thing indeed, for your impertinence to refuse a husband at my hands ! that simple heart of yours is swell'd to a fine degree of vanity : but your boldness is a little premature, and your triumph will be of short duration : you take advantage of the capricious fortune of one lucky day, but shall soon see what will be the event. Thou ungrateful little wretch, hast thou the insolence to please ? you understand me, madam, but I'll bring you back to that nothingness from whence you came, and you shall lament your folly and your pride : I'll shut you up for the rest of your life in a convent.

VOL. IV.

G

NANINE.

NANINE.

On my knees I thank you, madam; do, shut me up, my fate will be too mild: yes, madam, of all the benefits you have ever bestow'd on me, this, which you call a punishment, I shall esteem the greatest favour: shut me up for ever in a cloister, there I will thank you for your goodness, and bless my dear master: there I shall learn to calm those cruel fears, those dreadful alarms, those worst of evils, those passions that are far more dangerous to me even than your resentment, which fills me with terror and astonishment: O madam, by that anger, I entreat you, deliver me, save me, save me, if possible, from myself; this moment I am ready to go.

BARONESS.

What do I hear? can it be? are you in earnest, Nanine, or mean you to deceive me?

NANINE.

No; indeed I do not. O do me this charming, this divine favour; my heart stands too much in need of it.

BARONESS. [With transport.

Rise then, and let me embrace you. O happy hour! my dear Nanine, my friend, I'll go this instant and prepare your sweet retreat: O 'tis a charming thing to live in a convent!

NANINE.

NANINE.

'Tis at least a shelter from the world, and all its
cares.

BARONESS.

O, my dear, 'tis a delightful situation.

NANINE.

Do you think so, madam?

BARONESS.

This world is a hateful place—jealous —

NANINE.

[Sighing.]

'Tis so indeed.

BARONESS.

Foolish, wicked, vain, deceitful, inconstant, and
ungrateful: O 'tis a horrid place.

NANINE.

Yes, I see it wou'd be fatal to me, I ought to flee
from it.

BARONESS.

You ought indeed: a good convent is the best
haven of security: Now, my good lord, I think, I
shall be beforehand with you.

NANINE.

Did you say any thing about my master, madam?

BARONESS.

O Nanine, I love thee even to madness: this moment I wou'd, if possible, lock thee up never to come out again: but to night it is too late, we must wait till morning. Hark'ee, child, come to me at midnight to my apartment, and we will set off secretly for the convent: be ready by five at furthest.

S C E N E VI.

NANINE.

[Alone.

How distressful is my condition! what trouble and uneasiness do I feel! and what various passions rise in my soul! to leave so good, so amiable a master, perhaps to offend him by it: and yet, if I had stay'd, this excess of his goodness might have brought on worse calamities, and put his whole family in confusion. The baroness seems apprehensive he has a particular regard for me: but his heart cou'd never stoop so low; I must not, dare not think of it: and my lady seems desperately angry about it: am I hated then, and shou'd I be afraid of being belov'd? O but myself, myself I have most reason to fear, and my foolish heart, that beats so at the thought of him. What will become of me? taken out of my humble state, my notions now are too refined and too exalted: it is a misfortune, nay, and

and it is a fault too, to have a mind above one's condition. I must go: I know it will kill me: but no matter.

SCENE VII.

The COUNT, NANINE, a servant.

COUNT.

Stay at that door there somebody, d'ye hear? bring chairs here, quick, make haste. [He bows to Nanine, who makes him a low courtesy.] Come, sit down.

NANINE.

Who, I sir?

COUNT.

Yes: I will have it so: I mean to pay you, Nanine, that respect which your conduct, your beauty, and merit deserve: shines the diamond with less lustre, or is it less valuable, because found in a desert? What's the matter? your eyes seem bath'd in tears: O I see it but too plain; our angry baroness, jealous of your charms, has been venting her ill humours on you, and left my poor girl weeping.

NANINE.

No, sir, no: her goodness, I assure you, to me was never greater than at present; but every thing here softens and affects me.

COUNT.

I'm glad to hear it; I was afraid it was some of her malice.

NANINE.

Why so, sir?

COUNT.

O my dear girl, jealousy reigns in every breast: every man is jealous when he is in love, and every woman even before she is so. A young and beautiful girl, who at the same time is good-natured and sincere, is sure to displease her whole sex: men are more just, and we endeavour as well as we can to revenge ourselves on you for your jealousy: but, with regard to Nanine, I only do her justice, I love that heart which is void of artifice; I admire the display of those extraordinary talents which you have so finely cultivated; and I am both surpris'd and charm'd at the ingenuous simplicity of your manners.

NANINE.

O, sir, my merit is small indeed; but I have seen you, have heard and been instructed by you: you have rais'd me too high above my humble birth: I owe you but too much: from you only I have learn'd to think.

COUNT.

O Nanine, wit and good-sense are not to be taught.

NANINE

NAININE.

I think too much, I fear, for one in my station: my fortune design'd me for the lowest rank in life.

COUNT.

Your virtues have plac'd you in the highest: but tell me ingenuously, what effect had that English book I lent you?

NANINE.

Not convinc'd me at all, sir: I am more than ever of opinion, that there are hearts so noble and so generous, that all others must appear mean and vile when put in comparison with them.

COUNT.

True, Nanine, and you are yourself a proof of it: but permit me to raise you for the future to a rank and station here less unworthy of you.

NANINE.

My condition, sir, is already too high, and too desirable for me.

COUNT.

No, Nanine, that cannot be: henceforward I shall consider you as one of the family; my mother is coming, she will look on you as her daughter; my

esteem, and her tender friendship, will put you on a different footing, and place you in a better rank than you have hitherto held under a proud and imperious woman.

NANINE.

[Aside.]

She only taught me my duty, sir — and a hard one it is to fulfil.

C O U N T.

What duty? yours, Nanine, is only to please, and that you always perform; wou'd I cou'd do so too! but you shou'd be more at your ease, and appear with more splendor; you are not yet in your proper sphere.

NANINE.

I am indeed quite out of it, and it is that which makes me unhappy; 'tis my misfortune; perhaps an irreparable one. [*Rising*] O my lord, my master, remove, I beseech you, from me all these vanities: I am confus'd, overwhelm'd with your excess of goodness; let me live unknown and unenvy'd; heav'n form'd me for obscurity, and humility has nothing in it that to me is grating or disagreeable: leave me to my retreat; what shou'd I do in the world, what shou'd I wish to see there, after the admiration of your virtues?

C O U N T.

C O U N T.

[To himself.

It is too much, I can resist no longer.

[To Nanine.

You remain in obscurity? you?

N A N I N E.

Whatever I may do, permit me to ask one favour of you.

C O U N T.

What is it? speak.

N A N I N E.

For some time past you have loaded me with presents.

C O U N T.

Pardon me, Nanine, I acted but as a tender father, who lov'd his child: I have not the art to set off my presents by flattery, I aim not at gallantry, and only desire to be just: fortune had done you wrong, and I meant to revenge the injury: but nature, in recompence for it, lavish'd all her bounties on you, and her I strove to imitate.

N A N I N E.

You have done a great deal too much; but I flatter myself I may be permitted, without being thought ungrateful, to dispose of those noble presents, which I shall ever hold dear because they came from you.

C O U N T.

You mean to affront me, sure.

S C E N E VIII.

The C O U N T, N A N I N E, G E R M O N.

G E R M O N.

My lady wants you ; she waits.

C O U N T.

Let her wait then : what ! can't I speak a moment to you without being interrupted ?

N A N I N E.

It gives me pain to leave you ; but you know, sir, she was my mistress.

C O U N T.

No : I know it not, nor ever will.

N A N I N E.

She has still a power over me.

C O U N T.

No such thing : she shall have none—you sigh, Nanine, there's something at the bottom of that heart ; what's the matter ?

N A N I N E.

NANINE.

I am sorry to leave you sir—but I must—O heaven
now all is over.

[She goes out.

SCENE IX.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT. [To himself.

She wept as she left me; for a long time she has
groan'd beneath the tyrannical caprice of this peevish
baroness, who insults her: and by what right, or what
authority? but 'tis an abuse which I will never suffer:
this world is nothing but a lottery of wealth, titles,
dignities, rights, and privileges, barter'd for without
legal claim, and scatter'd without distinction — here,
you,—

GERMON.

My lord.

COUNT:

To morrow morning lay this purse of a hundred
louis-dor's upon her toilette; be sure you don't fail;
you must then go and see after her servants below,
they'll wait there.

GERMON:

The baroness shall certainly have them on her
toilette according to your orders.

COUNT

COUNT.

Blockhead, they're not for her: for Nanine, I tell you.

GERMON.

O very well, sir, I beg pardon.

COUNT.

Be gone, leave me. [Germon goes out.] This tenderness of mine can never be a weakness in me: true, I idolise her; but my heart was not touch'd by her beauty only, her character is to the last degree amiable: I admire her soul; but then her low condition—it is too high; were she lower, I shou'd love her yet more: but can I marry her? doubtless I may; can one pay too dear for being happy? shall I fear the censure of an idle world, and let pride deprive me of all I wish for? but then custom—a cruel tyrant: nature has a prior right, and shou'd be obey'd: and so I am Blaise's rival too; and why not? Blaise is a man; he loves her, and he is in the right of it: she can be but in the possession of one, though the desire of all: gardeners may sigh for her, and so might kings: my happiness will justify my choice.

END of the FIRST ACT.

A C T . I I . S C E N E . I .

The COUNT, MARIN.

COUNT.

[To himself.

WELL: this night is a whole year to me: not once have I closed my eyes-lids: every body is asleep but me; Nanine sleeps in peace, a sweet repose refreshes her charms, whilst I wander from place to place, and can find no rest: I sit down to write, but can't: then strive to read, but all in vain; I don't know the words before me whilst I am looking on them, nor can my mind retain a single idea: methinks, in every page, I see the name of Nanine imprinted by some hand divine——hola! whose there? all asleep?

Germon, Marin.

MARIN.

[Behind the scenes.

Coming, sir.

COUNT.

You idle rascals, make haste, it's broad day-light; come, come.

MARIN.

Lard, sir, what spirit has rais'd you up so early this morning?

COUNT.

Love.

MARIN.

M A R I N.

O ho ! my lady will let none of us sleep long in this house ; what did you want, sir ?

C O U N T.

Why, Marin, I must have, let me see, by to-morrow at furthest, six new horses, a new equipage, a clever chamber-maid, notable, and careful, a valet-de-chambre, and two footmen, young, and well-made, and no libertines ; some diamonds, some very fine buckles, some gold trinkets, and some new stuffs ; therefore be gone, ride post to Paris this instant, never mind killing a few horses.

M A R I N.

O ho, I see how it is ; you are caught ; my lady baroness is to be our mistress to day, I suppose ; you are going to be marry'd to her at last ?

C O U N T.

Whatever my intention is, go you about your business ; fly, and make haste back.

M A R I N.

I'm gone, sir.

SCENE II.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT.

[To himself.

And shall I then enjoy the sweet pleasure of honouring, of making happy the dear object of my love? The baroness, I know, will be in a rage: with all my heart, let her rave as long as she will; I despise her, and the world, and its opinion; and am afraid of no body: I will never be the slave of prejudice, it is an enemy whom we ought to subdue, those who make a rational mind more virtuous, and those only are respectable: but hark! what noise is that in the court? a chariot sure: it must be so; yet who cou'd come at this time in the morning? my mother perhaps. Germon ——

GERMON.

Sir.

COUNT.

What is that?

GERMON.

A chariot, sir.

COUNT.

Who's is it? any body coming here?

GERMON.

No, sir, they're going.

COUNT.

C O U N T.

Going? who? where?

G E R M O N.

The baroness, sir, going out immediately.

C O U N T.

O with all my heart, let her go for ever if she pleases!

G E R M O N.

Nanine and she are this minute setting out.

C O U N T.

O heav'n! what sayst thou? Nanine?

G E R M O N.

So the maid says, sir.

C O U N T.

How is this?

G E R M O N.

My lady, sir, is going with her this morning, to put her into a neighbouring convent.

C O U N T.

Away: fly: let us begone: but what am I about?
 I am too warm to talk to them: no matter, I'll go;
 I ought—but stop, that must not be, I shou'd at once discover all my passion: no—go, Germion, stop them, let every thing be fast; bring Nanine to me, or answer it with your life. [Germion goes out] So they wou'd

wou'd have carry'd her off! what a dreadful stroke! ungrateful, cruel, unjust woman! how have I deserv'd this! what have I done! I only lov'd, and adored her; but never declar'd my passion; never endeavour'd to force her inclinations, or to alarm her fearful innocence: why shou'd she fly from me? the more I think on it, the more I am astonish'd.

SCENE III.

The COUNT, NANINE.

COUNT.

My sweet girl, is it you? what, run away from me? answer me, explain this myst'ry to me: terrify'd, I suppose, with the baroness's threats, you were willing to escape; and that tender regard which I have long had for your virtues, I know, has quickned her resentment: you cou'd not sure yourself have thought of leaving me, of depriving this place of its fairest ornament: last night, when I saw you in tears, tell me, Nanine, had you any intention of this? answer me, tell me, why wou'd you have wish'd to leave me?

NANINE.

Behold me on my knees, and trembling before you

COUNT. [Raising her up.

Rise, Nanine, and tell me—I tremble more myself.

NANINE.

NANINE.

My lady, sir——

COUNT.

Well—what of her?

NANINE.

That lady, sir, whom I honour and esteem, did not, I assure you, force me to the convent.

COUNT.

And cou'd it then be your own choice? O misery!

NANINE.

It was, I own it was : I entreated her to restrain my wand'ring thoughts—she wanted to have marry'd me.

COUNT.

Indeed? to whom?

NANINE.

To your gardener.

COUNT.

O the worthy choice!

NANINE.

I, sir, was ashame'd, and to the last degree unhappy: I who in vain endeavour to stifle sentiments far above my condition, I whom your bounty had rais'd too high, must now be punish'd by the loss of that goodness which I never deserv'd.

COUNT.

COUNT.

You punish yourself, Nanine, and for what?

NANINE.

For having dared to raise the resentment of your relation, sir, who was once my mistress; I know, sir, I am disagreeable to her; the very sight of me disgusts her: she has reason indeed, for when I was near her, I was guilty of a weakness which I shall ever feel; it grows upon me every hour: but I wou'd have torn it from my breast; I would have humbled, by the austerities of a convent, this proud heart, exalted by your goodness, and revenged on it the involuntary crime: but the bitterest grief I felt, was my fear of offending you.

COUNT. [Turning from her, and walking about.

What sentiments! what a noble and ingenuous mind! Can she be prejudic'd in my favour? was she afraid of loving me? O exalted virtue!

NANINE.

If I have offended you, I beg a thousand pardons; but permit me, sir, in some deep retreat to hide my sorrows, and to reflect in secret on my own duty, and your goodness to me.

COUNT.

COUNT.

No more of that: now, observe me, the baroness is your friend, and out of her generosity has provided you with a servant, a rustic, a boor, for your husband. I know of one who will at least be less unworthy of you: in birth and fortune far superior to Blaise; young, honest, and well provided for: a man, I assure you, of sense and reflection; his character very different from those of the present age: if I am not much mistaken, he'll make you an excellent husband: is not this better than a convent?

NANINE.

No: sir, I own to you, this new favour which you wou'd bestow on me has nothing in it that can give me any real satisfaction: you know my grateful heart, read there my real sentiments, and see why I wish to retreat from the world: a gardener, or the monarch of the whole world, who shou'd offer marriage to me, wou'd be equally displeasing.

COUNT.

You have determin'd me: and now, Nanine, know the man for whom I have design'd you: you already esteem him: he is yours; he adores you: that husband is—myself. I see, you are troubled and surpriz'd: but speak to me; my life depends on you: O recollect yourself, you are strangely agitated.

NANINE.

NANINE.

What do I hear? can it be?

COUNT.

It is no more than you deserve.

NANINE.

In love with me? O do not think, do not imagine I will ever dare to claim my conquest: no, sir, never will I suffer you to descend thus low for me: such marriages, believe me, sir, are always unhappy: taste goes off, and repentance alone remains. No, I will call your ancestors to witness — alas! sir, think not on me: you took pity on my youth: this heart, which you have form'd, which is your own work, wou'd be unworthy of your care, if it cou'd accept from you this noblest present. No, sir, I owe you at least this refusal: my heart shall sacrifice itself for your sake.

COUNT.

No more: for I am resolv'd, and you shall be my wife. Did you not this moment assure me you wou'd refuse every other man, tho' he were a prince?

NANINE.

I did, and repent not of the resolution.

COUNT.

Do you haet me then?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Shou'd I have fled from, shou'd I have avoided, shou'd
I have fear'd, if I had hated you?

COUNT.

It is enough, and I am fix'd.

NANINE.

What then have you determin'd on?

COUNT.

Our marriage.

NANINE.

Think, sir.

COUNT.

I have thought of every thing.

NANINE.

And foreseen too?

COUNT.

I have.

NANINE.

If you love me, believe me, sir —

COUNT.

I do believe—that I have resolv'd on the only means
to make myself happy.

NANINE.

But you forget —

COUNT.

C O U N T.

I have forgot nothing: every thing is order'd, and every thing shall be ready.

N A N I N E.

What! in spite of all I say, will your obstinate passion—

C O U N T.

Yes, spite of thee, my impatient love must urge the happy moment. I will quit thee for a minute, that henceforth we may never part: adieu, my dear Nanine.

S C E N E IV.

N A N I N E.

[Alone.]

Good heaven! do I dream? or am I indeed arriv'd at the submit of earthly happiness? 'tis not the honour, great as it is, 'tis not the splendor that dazzles me: no: I despise it all: but to wed the most generous of men, the dear object of all my fearful wishes, him whom I was so much afraid of loving, him whom I adore, yet I love him too much to wish he shou'd demean himself for my sake: but it is impossible to avoid it; I cannot now escape him: what can I do? heaven, I trust, will direct me, and support my weakness, perhaps even — but I'll write to him — and yet how to begin, and what to say — what a surprise! I

will

will write immediately, before I enter into this solemn engagement.

S C E N E V.

NANINE, BLAISE.

BLAISE.

O there she is : well, my little maid, my lady has spoke to you in my favour, has not she ? ha ? she writes on, and takes no notice of me.

NANINE.

[Writing on.

O Blaife, good morrow to you.

BLAISE.

Good morrow is but a cold compliment.

NANINE.

[Writing.

Every word I write doubles my distress, and my whole letter is full of doubts and uneasiness.

BLAISE.

How she writes off hand ! O she's a great genius ; and a monstrous wit : I wish I was a wit too, then I'd tell her —

NANINE.

Well, sir.

BLAISE.

Lack-a-day, she's so clever, I'm afraid to speak : I shall never be able to break my mind to her — yet I was hot upon't, and came here o'purpose, that I did.

NANINE.

NANINE.

Dear Blaise, you must do me a piece of service.

BLAISE.

Marry, two, and you will.

NANINE.

I shall trust to your discretion, to your good heart, Blaise; nay, I do you but justice.

BLAISE.

O no ceremony; for look you, ma'am, Blaise is ready to serve you, and there's an end of it. Come, come, make no secret.

NANINE.

You often go to the neighbouring village, to Removal, the right hand of the road.

BLAISE.

Yes, yes.

NANINE.

Ceu'd you find one Philip Hombert for me there?

BLAISE.

Philip Hombert? I know nothing of him: what sort of a man is he?

NANINE.

He came there, I believe, but yesterday evening; do you enquire him out, and give him immediately this money, and this letter.

BLAISE.

O money is it?

NANINE.

And at the same time deliver him this packet: go on horse-back, that you may return the sooner: away, make haste, and be assur'd I'll remember you for it.

BLAISE.

I wou'd go for you to the world's end — this Philip Hombert is a happy rogue: the purse is full: all ready Rhino. What, is it a debt?

NANINE.

Yes: and well-prov'd: nothing can be more sacred, therefore take care of it: hark'ee, Blaize, Hombert may not be known in the village, perhaps he is not yet return'd: if you can't give the letter into his own hands, bring it me back again: my dear friend, remember that.

BLAISE.

My dear friend!

NANINE.

I shall depend upon you.

BLAISE.

Her dear friend! O ljud!

NANINE.

NANINE.

I rely intirely upon you, and expect every thing from your fidelity.

SCENE VI.

The BARONESS, BLAISE.

BLAISE.

What a message ! and where the deuce cou'd this money come from ? it wou'd have been of service to me in house-keeping : but she has a friendship for me, and that's better than money, so away we go.

[As he is putting the money and letter into his pocket, he meets the baroness, and runs full against her.

BARONESS.

How now, booby ? a little more and you'd broke my head.

BLAISE.

I beg your pardon, madam.

BARONESS.

Where are you going ? have you heard any thing of Nanine ? what is she about ? is the count in a violent passion ? what have you got there, a letter ?

BLAISE.

O that's a secret : poise on her !

BARONESS.

Let me look at it.

BLAISE.

Nanine will be angry.

BARONESS.

Nanine! cou'd she write, and send it by you? give it me this minute, or I'll break off your match immediately; give it me, I say.

BLAISE.

[Laughing.]

He! he!

BARONESS.

What do you laugh at?

BLAISE.

[Still laughing.]

Ah! ah!

BARONESS.

I must know the contents of this; — [Breaks open the letter] if I am not mistaken, they concern me nearly.

BLAISE.

[Laughing.]

Ah! ah! ah! how she is nick'd now! she has got nothing there but a scrap of paper: but I shall keep the money, and carry it to Philip Hombert: yes, yes, must obey my mistress. Servant, ma'am.

SCENE

S C E N E VII.

The BARONESS alone.

Now let's see what we have got. [Reads.] " Both
" my joy and tenderness are unspeakable, as is my
" happiness also: what a moment was this for you to
" come in! when I cannot see or hear you, cannot
" throw myself into your arms: but, I conjure you,
" take these packets, and accept the contents of
" them. Know, I have been offer'd a most noble
" and truly enviable condition in life, such as I might
" well be dazzled with the prospect of: but there is
" nothing which I wou'd not sacrifice to the only one
" upon earth whom my heart ought to love." Very
fine indeed! upon my word, Mrs. Nanine, an ex-
cellent stile: how prettily she writes! the innocent
orphan: her passion speaks most eloquently: a rare
billet this! O, thou fly jade: thus you deceiv'd poor
Blaise, and thus depriv'd me of my lover: this going
into a convent, I find, was all a feint, a pretence;
and the count's money, it seems, is for Philip Hom-
bert: thou little coquette! but I am glad on't: the
count's perfidiousness to me deserv'd this return: I
thought indeed Nanine's heart was as mean as her
birth, and now I am satisfy'd of it.

SCENE VIII.

The COUNT, BARONESS.

BARONESS.

But here comes the philosopher, the sentimental count d'Olbán, the wife lover, the man above prejudice: your servant, noble count, approach and laugh, my dear lover, at the most ridiculous circumstance: do you know Philip Hombert, of Remival? but, to be sure, you can't be a stranger to your — rival.

COUNT.

What is all this, pray?

BARONESS.

This billet perhaps will inform you: this Hombert must be a handsome lad.

COUNT.

You are too late, madam, now with your schemes; my resolution once made, I am not to be shaken: be satisfy'd, madam, with the shameful trick you wanted to play me this morning.

BARONESS.

You'll find this new one a worse, I believe: there, read: [Gives him the letter] you'll like it vastly: you know

know the hand, and you know the virtue of the dear nymph that has subdued you : [Whilst he is reading it he seems confounded, grows pale, and angry] well, sir, what think you of the stile ? — he sees nothing, says nothing, hears nothing : poor man ! but he deserves it.

COUNT.

Did I read aright ? it cannot be. I am astonish'd, thunder-struck ; ungrateful sex ! perfidious creature !

BARONESS.

[Aside.]

I know his temper well ; naturally violent, quick and resolute : he'll do something immediately.

S C E N E IX.

The COUNT, BARONESS, GERMON.

GERMON.

Yonder comes madam Olban : she's in the avenue already.

BARONESS.

Is the old woman return'd ?

GERMON.

Sir, sir, my lady, your mother, is coming.

BARONESS.

His anger has taken away his hearing : the letter operates finely.

GERMON. [Eawling out to him.
Sir.

COUNT.

Does she think —

GERMON.

[Aloud.

My lady, sir, your mother.

COUNT.

What is Nanine doing at this instant?

GERMON.

Writing in her own apartment — but, sir —

COUNT. [With an air of coolness.

Go, seize her papers; bring me what she writes, and then let her be sent away.

GERMON.

Who, sir?

COUNT.

Nanine.

GERMON.

I can never have the heart to do it, sir: O, sir, if you knew how she charms us all, so noble, so good!

COUNT.

Do it, sir, or see my face no more.

GERMON.

I obey, sir.

[He goes out.

S C E N E

SCENE X.

The COUNT, BARONESS.

BARONESS.

Now, the day is ours : I give you joy, sir, of your return to reason : now, sir, is not it true as I told you, the low-bred always retain something of their former condition, and persons of family alone have hearts truly noble ? Blood, sir, let me tell you, does every thing, and meanness of birth will inspire Nanine with sentiments you never suspected her of.

COUNT.

That I don't believe : but come, we'll talk no more about it, but endeavour to make amends for past errors: every man has his follies, at some part of his life ; we all go wrong ; and he is least to blame who repents the soonest.

BARONESS.

'Tis well observ'd.

COUNT.

Never mention her to me again : be silent on that head, I entreat you.

BARONESS.

Most willingly.

H 5

COUNT.

COUNT.

I beg this subject of our dispute may be intirely forgot.

[BARONESS.

But will you remember then your former vows?

COUNT.

Well, well, I understand you, I will.

BARONESS.

And quickly too, or you will not repair the injury: our marriage so shamefully deferr'd is an affront —

COUNT.

That shall be made amends for; but, madam, we must have —

BARONESS.

Have what? we must have a lawyer.

COUNT.

You know, madam, that — I waited for my mother.

BARONESS.

And here she comes.

SCENE

SCENE XI.

The MARCHIONESS D'OLBAN, the COUNT, BARONESS.

COUNT. [To his mother.]

Madam, I shou'd have— [Aside] O; Philip Homber! [To his mother] but you have prevented me: my respect, and tenderness— [Aside] with that air of innocence too! perfidious wretch!

MARCHIONESS.

Why, you rave, child; I heard indeed, as I pass'd thro' Paris, that your head was a little touch'd, and I find there was some truth in it; how long has this misfortune —

COUNT.

Good heaven! how confused I am!

MARCHIONESS.

Does it seize you often?

COUNT.

It never will again, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

I should be glad to speak with you alone. [Turns to the baroness and makes her a formal courtesy.] Good morrow, madam.

BARO-

BARONESS.

[Aside.]

The old fool? [Turning to the Marchioness] Madam, I leave you the pleasure of entertaining the count at your leisure, and retire.

[She goes out.]

S C E N E XII.

The MARCHIONESS, the COUNT.

MARCHIONESS.

[Talking very fast, and in the manner of a little prattling old woman.]

Well, sir, and so you intend to make the baroness my daughter-in-law: 'twas this, to tell you the truth, that brought me here so soon: she's a peevish, impertinent, proud, opinionated creature, and one who never had the least regard for me: last year, when I supp'd with the marchioness Agard, she said before all the company, I was a babbler. Lord forbid I shou'd ever sup there again: a babbler! besides I know, between you and me, she is not so rich; and that, let me tell you, son, is a great point, and we ought to be well inform'd about it: they tell me that the chateau d'orme did but half of it belong to her husband, and that the other half was disputed by a long law-suit, that is not finish'd to this day: that I had from your grand--papa, and he always told truth:

ay,

ay, he was a man; there are few such now a'days: there is nothing now at Paris but a set of half-men, vain, foolish, impertinent coxbombs, talking upon ev'ry subject, and laughing at times past. O, their eternal clack distracts me, prating about new kitchens, and new fashions: we hear of nothing now but bankrupts, and distres, and ruin: the wives, in short, are licentious, and the husbands simpletons: every thing grows worse and worse.

COUNT. [Reading the letter over again.

Who cou'd have thought it? this is a desperate stroke indeed. Well, Germon?

S C E N E XIII.

The MARCHIONESS, the COUNT, GERMON.

GERMON.

Here's your lawyer, sir.

COUNT.

O! let him wait.

GERMON.

And here's the paper, sir, she sent you.

COUNT. [Reading.

Give it me—well, let me see: she loves me, she says here, and refuses me out of—respect. Faithless woman!

woman ! thou haft not told me the true reason of that refusal.

MARCHIONESS.

My son's head is certainly turn'd : 'tis the baroness's doing : love has taken away his sences.

COUNT.

[To Germion.]

Is Nanine gone ! shall I be rid of her ?

GERMON.

Alas ! sir, she has already put on her old rustic garb with the greatest modesty, and never murmur'd or complain'd.

COUNT.

Very likely so.

GERMON.

She bore her misfortune with the utmost tranquillity, whilst every body about her were in tears.

COUNT.

With tranquillity, say'st thou ?

MARCHIONESS..

Who are you talking about ?

GERMON.

O madam, poor Nanine, she is going to be driven away, and every body laments the loss of her.

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

To be driven away? how is this? I don't understand it: what! my little Nanine go! call her back again: my charming orphan! what has she done, pray? why, Nanine was my present to you. O I remember, at ten years of age she delighted every body that saw her: our baroness took her, and I said then she wou'd be ill-used; I knew it wou'd be so: but you never mind what I say, you will do every thing of your own head: but let me tell you, turning Nanine out of doors thus is a very bad action..

COUNT.

Alone, on foot, without money, without assistance!

GERMON.

O, sir, I forgot to tell you: an old man ask'd after you below, and says he wants to speak to you on an affair of importance, which he can communicate to none but yourself: he wants to throw himself at your feet.

COUNT.

In my present unhappy situation of mind, am I fit to converse with any body?

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

Thou art uneasy enough, I believe, child, and so am I too, to drive away poor Nanine, and make up a marriage which you knew wou'd be disagreeable to me: come, it was not a wise thing; in three months time you will be weary of one another: I'll tell you what happen'd exactly like this to my cousin the marquis of Marmure: his wife was as fower as verjuice, tho', by the by, yours is worse; when they marry'd, they thought they lov'd one another, and in two months after they were parted. My lady went to live with her gallant, a foolish, sharking, extravagant fop; and my lord took a vile, tricking, ridiculous coquette! fine suppers, country howies, horses, cloaths, a rascally steward, new trinkets, bought upon trust, lawyers, contracts, interest-money, all together soon ruin'd them, and in two years both went together to the hospital. O, and now I think of it, I remember another story, more tragical, and more extraordinary than the other, it was of a—

COUNT.

My dear mother, we must go in to dinner: come—cou'd I ever have suspected such infidelity!

MARCHIONESS.

"Tis really dreadful: but I'll tell it you all at table: in proper time and place, son, it may be of great use to you. Away.

END of the SECOND ACT.

A C T III. S C E N E I.

NANINE, cloath'd as a country girl, GERMON.

GERMON.

WE are all in tears at the thoughts of losing you.

NANINE.

It is time to go: I've staid too long already.

GERMON.

But you wont leave us for ever, I hope, and in this dress too?

NANINE.

Obscurity was my first condition.

GERMON.

What a change! and only from this morning: to suffer is nothing; but to be degraded is terrible.

NANINE.

NANINE.

No, no, there are a thousand times worse misfortunes.

GERMON.

I admire your patience, and humility : surely my master must have been ill advis'd : our baroness has certainly abus'd her power : she must have done you this injury, the count cou'd never have the heart.

GERMON. NANINE.

I am indebted to him for every thing ; and, if he thinks fit to banish me, I must submit; his favours are his own, and he has a right to recall them.

GERMON.

Who wou'd ever have expected such a change? what do you intend to do with yourself?

NANINE.

To retire, and repent.

GERMON.

How we shall all detest the baroness !

NANINE.

They have made me miserable, but I forgive them.

GERMON.

But what shall I tell my master from you when you are gone?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Tell him, I thank him for restoring me to my former condition: tell him that, for ever sensible of his goodness, I shall forget nothing but his—cruelty.

GERMON.

You melt my very soul; I cou'd leave this house immediately to go along with you wherever you went: but Blaife is before hand with us all: he will go and live with you, and we are all ready to follow him.

NANINE.

No, Germon, that I'm sure you are not. O Germon, to be driven out in this manner,—and by whom?

GERMON.

The devil is certainly at the bottom of this busines: you are leaving us, and my master is going to be marry'd.

NANINE.

Marry'd, sayst thou? indeed? nay, then let us be gone: O he was too dangerous for me—farewell.

GERMON.

Well! after all, my master must have a cruel heart, to banish so sweet a creature: she seems a most amiable girl, but in this world one shou'd swear to nothing.

SCENE II.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT.

Well, is she gone at last?

GERMON.

Yes, sir, 'tis done.

COUNT.

I'm glad on't.

GERMON.

Then, sir, you have a heart of iron.

COUNT.

Did Philip Hombert meet and give her his hand?

GERMON.

What Philip Hombert, sir? alas! sir, poor Nanine went off without a creature to give her his hand; she wou'd not even accept of mine.

COUNT.

And where is she gone?

GERMON.

That I know not; most probably to her friends.

COUNT.

Ay, at Remival, I suppose.

GERMON.

GERMON.

Yes, I believe she went that road.

COUNT.

Go, Germont, immediately, and conduct her to that convent where the baroness was going this morning, I'll lodge her in that safe retreat : the hundred Louis d'or's will secure her reception ; carry them to her, but take care she does not know they come from me : tell her 'tis a present from my mother : upon no account mention my name to her.

GERMON.

Very well, sir, I shall obey your orders.

[He goes towards the door.

COUNT.

Germont, you saw her as she went off?

GERMON.

I did, sir.

COUNT.

Did she seem dejected? did she weep?

GERMON.

She behav'd still better, sir ; a few tears dropp'd from her, but she strove as much as she cou'd to repress them.

COUNT.

Did she let fall any thing that betray'd her sentiments? did you remark —

GERMON.

What, sir?

COUNT.

Did she say any thing of me?

GERMON.

Yes, sir; a great deal.

COUNT.

Tell me, then, rascal, what did she say?

GERMON.

That you were her master, her best and kindest benefactor; that she shall forget every thing — but your cruelty.

COUNT.

Away — be sure you take care she never returns;
[Germon going out] and hark'ee, Germon.

GERMON.

Sir.

COUNT.

One word more: remember, if, by chance, as you are conducting her, one Philip Hombert shou'd follow you, that you treat him in a proper manner.

GER-

GERMON.

O, sir, I'll use him most politely, and treat him with a good drubbing, that you may depend on: I'll do the business honestly, I warrant you: young Hombert, you say?

COUNT.

The same.

GERMON.

Very well: I have not the honour to know him, but the first man I see will I trim most heartily, and afterwards make him tell me his name. [*He goes towards the door and comes back.*] This young Hombert, I'll lay my life, is some lover of her's, a beau, a prig, I suppose, the cock of the village. Let me alone to deal with him.

COUNT.

Do as I bid you, and immediately.

GERMON.

I thought there was some lover in the case — and Blaife too puts in his claim, I suppose. Ay: they always love their equals better than their masters.

COUNT.

Be gone, I tell you.

SCENE

The COUNT.

[Alone.]

He's in the right, and has hit on the true cause of my unhappiness, but I shall myself be the punisher of my own folly. I must now marry the baroness; it is determin'd, and I can't avoid it: 'tis dreadful; but I have deserv'd it: 'twill at least be a convenient match: she's not very tractable indeed, but every man may rule, if he has a mind to it; and he who has resolution may, at any time, be master in his own house.

SCENE. IV.

The COUNT, BARONESS, MARCHIONESS.

MARCHIONESS..

Well, son, you are going to marry this lady here?

COUNT.

Yes, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

This night she is to be your wife and my daughter-in-law?

BARONESS.

If you approve of it, madam; I suppose I shall have your consent.

MARCHIONESS.

Why, I must give it, I think: but to-morrow I shall take my leave of you.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Your leave, madam, why so?

MARCHIONESS.

I shall take my Nanine with me: since you have thought fit to turn her out of doors, I shall take her under my protection: I have a match in my eye for her: I propose marrying her to the young chief justice, nephew to the attorney-general, Jean Roc Souci; he whose father met with that comical adventure at Corbeil; you must have heard of him: yes, I will take care of this poor child, I'm determin'd: she is a jewel, and deserves to be well set. I'll marry her off immediately. Your servant.

COUNT.

My dear mother, don't be in a passion: leave me to manage my own affairs, and let Nanine go into a convent.

BARONESS.

Indeed, madam, you may believe us, such a girl as Nanine is not fit to go into a family.

MARCHIONESS.

Ha! why, what's the matter?

BARONESS.

O a little affair only.

MARCHIONESS.

But pray —

VOL. IV.

I

BARO-

BARONESS.

O nothing at all.

MARCHIONES.

Nothing! a great deal, I'm afraid: I understand you mighty well: some little indiscretion I suppose: nothing more likely, for to be sure she's very handsome: Ay, ay, we are all frail; we tempt, and are tempted; the heart has its weakness: young girls are always a little coquettish: but come, it is not so bad as you make it; tell me fairly, what my poor child has done?

COUNT.

I tell you, madam?

MARCHIONESS.

You seem, after all, at the bottom to have some regard for the girl, and perhaps you may —

SCENE V.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, BARONESS.

MARIN. [Beated.

MARIN.

I've done it, sir; it's all agreed for.

MARCHIONESS.

What's agreed for?

BARONESS.

Ay, what, sir, what?

MARIN.

MARIN.

Why, sir, I've done as you order'd me, spoke to the tradesmen, and you'll have your equipage to-morrow.

BARONESS.

What equipage?

MARIN.

Every thing, madam, that your future spouse had order'd ; six fine horses, and a charming berlin ; I'm sure your ladyship will like it ; it's very fine ; the pannels all varnish'd by Martin : the diamonds too are brilliant, and well-chosen ; and the new stuffs quite in taste.—O nothing comes up to 'em.

BARONESS. [To the count.

And had you order'd all this?

COUNT.

I had — [Aside] but for whom !

MARIN.

Every thing will come to-morrow morning in the coach, and will be ready for your wedding in the evening : O there's nothing like Paris for getting every thing at a minute's warning, if you have but money. As I came back, I call'd on the lawyer ; he's just by, finishing your affair.

BARONESS.

It has hung a long time in suspense.

MARCHIONESS.

[Aside.]

I wish it wou'd hang these forty years.

MARIN.

In the hall I met a poor old man, fighing and in tears ; he has waited a long time, he says, and begs to speak to you.

BARONESS.

An impertinent fellow ! let him go about his busi-
ness : he has chose a wrong time to trouble us now.

MARCHIONESS.

Why, so, madam ? have a little consideration : son, let me tell you, it's very wrong to repulse poor people in this manner ; I have told you over and over, when you was a child, you ought to treat them with indulgence ; hear what they have to say ; be courteous, and affable to 'em : are not they men as well as yourself : we don't know perhaps who we affront, and may re-
pent our hardnes of heart : the proud never prosper.

[*To Marin*] Go, see for that old man.

MARIN.

I will ma'am [*He goes out.*]

COUNT.

COUNT.

Forgive me, madam, my respects are always due to you, and I am ready to see this man, in spite of my present embarrassment.

SCENE. VI.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, BARONESS, a PEASANT.

MARCHIONESS. [To the Peasant.
Come, come, speak, don't be afraid.

PEASANT.

O, my lord, for heaven's sake hear me; permit me to fall at your feet, and to give you back—

COUNT.

Rise, friend; I'll not be knelt to; do not imagine me capable of such pride: you seem to be an honest man, do you want employment in my family? who are you?

MARCHIONESS.

Chear up, man.

PEASANT.

Alas! sir, I am the father of—Nanine.

COUNT.

You?

BARONESS.

Your daughter's a slut.

PEASANT.

This, sir, is what I fear'd : this is the cruel stroke that has wounded my poor heart : I thought indeed so much money cou'd not fairly belong to one in her condition : we little folks soon lose our integrity when we come among the great.

BARONESS.

There he's right enough : but still he's a deceiver, for Nanine is not his daughter, she was an orphan.

PEASANT.

It is too true, she was so : I left her with her poor relations in her infant years, having lost her mother, with all my fortune ; oblig'd by necessity, I went to serve abroad ; and as I wou'd not have her pass for the daughter of a soldier, forbad her ever to mention my name.

MARCHIONESS.

Why so ? for my part, I respect a soldier : we stand in need of them sometimes.

COUNT.

What is there shameful in the profession ?

PEASANT.

It meets indeed with less honour than it deserves.

COUNT.

COUNT.

The prejudice against them is inexcusable. I own, I esteem an honest soldier, who hazards his life in the defence of his king and country, much more than an important self sufficient scoundrel, whose knavish industry sucks up the blood of his fellow subjects.

MARCHIONESS.

You must have been in a great many battles: let me have an account of them all; I long to hear it.

PEASANT.

In my present unhappy condition you must excuse me: let it suffice to inform you, that I receiv'd a thousand promises of advancement; but, without friends, how was it possible to rise? thrown amongst the common croud, all I cou'd do was to distinguish myself, and honour my only reward.

MARCHIONESS.

You were then well born?

BARONESS.

Eye: how can you think so! well born indeed?

PEASANT.

No, madam: but I was born of honest parents, and merited—a better daughter.

MARCHIONESS.

Cou'd you have had a better?

COUNT.

Well! go on,

MARCHIONESS.

A better than Nanine?

COUNT.

Prithee, go on.

PEASANT.

My daughter, I understood, was brought up here, and treated in the kindest manner; I thought myself happy, and bless'd heaven for your goodness, and paternal care of her; I came to the neighbouring village, full of hopes and fears; I own I trembled for her dangerous youth; and, by this lady's intimation, find I had but too much reason; it has shock'd me to the soul; but I thought a hundred louis d'or's, besides diamonds, was a treasure too great to be fairly come by: she cou'd never be mistress of them, but at the expence of her innocence: the bare suspicion makes me shudder; if it be so, I shall die with grief and shame: but I came as soon as possible, to give 'em you back again: they are your's, therefore, I beseech you, take 'em: if my daughter is to blame, punish me, but don't ruin her.

M A R-

MARCHIONESS.

O my dear son, I cannot bear this; it overpowers me.

BARONESS.

What is all this? a dream? a trick?

COUNT.

O! what have I done?

PEASANT. [Taking out the purse.
and the letter.

Here, sir, take 'em.

COUNT.

I take 'em! no: they were given to her, and she
has made a noble use of them: was it to you then the
message was deliver'd? who brought it?

PEASANT.

Your gardener, sir, in whom Nanine ventur'd to
confide.

COUNT.

Was it directed to you?

PEASANT.

It was, I own it, sir.

COUNT.

O grief, O tenderness! what excess of virtue in them
both! but now your name?—O I am lost, distracted.

MARCHIONESS.

Ay, your name. What mystery is this?

PEASANT.

Philip Hombert de Gatine.

COUNT.

O my father!

BARONESS.

What does he say?

COUNT.

How day breaks in upon me! I have done wrong, and I must make amends for it: O if you knew how culpable I have been! I have injur'd the sublimest virtue. [He steps aside, and speaks to one of his servants.] away: fly.

BARONESS.

What is all this emotion for?

COUNT.

My coach immediately.

MARCHIONESS.

Now, madam, you must be her protectress: when we have done such an injury, we shou'd blush at nothing so much as an imperfect repentance; my son often has his whims, which people are too apt to mistake for unpardonable follies; but at bottom he has a generous soul, and is naturally good; I can do what I

please

please with him: you, my daughter-in-law, are not so well-dispos'd.

BARONESS.

I shall grow out of all patience: how confus'd and thoughtful he looks! what strange scheme now is he meditating upon? well, sir, what do you intend to do?

MARCHIONESS.

Ay, for Nanine?

BARONESS.

Make her a handsome present, and satisfy her.

MARCHIONESS.

That will be the least we can do.

BARONESS.

But as to seeing her that I never will: she shall not come nigh the castle: do you hear me?

COUNT.

Yes, I hear you.

MARCHIONESS.

[Aside.]

What a heart of stone!

BARONESS.

Don't give my suspicions cause to break out, sir. Hal! you hesitate.

COUNT. [After a pause of sometime.]

No, madam, I am resolv'd.

BARON.

BARONESS.

That respect at least is owing to me ; nay, to both of us.

MARCHIONESS.

And can you be so cruel, son ?

BARONESS.

What step do you propose to take ?

COUNT.

'Tis taken already : you know my heart, madam, and the frankness of it : I must be plain with you : I had promis'd you my hand ; but the design of our marriage was only to put an end to a tedious law-suit between us, which I will now do immediately, by willingly resigning to you all those rights and pretensions which were the foundation of it : even the interest shall be your's ; I give up every thing, take, and enjoy it : if since we cannot be man and wife, let us at least live as friends and relations : let every thing that gave mutual uneasiness be forgot : there is no reason why, because we can't love, we shou'd hate each other.

BARONESS.

Your falsehood is what I expected : but I renounce your presents, and yourself : yes, traitor, I see now who you mean to live with, and how low your passion

sinks

sinks you: go, and be a slave to her, I leave you to your unworthy choice.

[She goes out.

SCENE VII.

THE COUNT, MARCHIONESS, PHILIP HOMBERT.

COUNT.

No, madam, 'tis not unworthy, my soul is not blinded by an idle passion: that virtue which it is my duty to reward ought to melt, but cannot debase me: what they call meanness in this old man constitutes his merit, and makes him truly noble: if I wou'd be so, I must pay the price of it: where souls are thus ennobled by themselves, and distinguish'd by superior characters, we shou'd pass over common rules: their birth, low as it is, when attended with such virtues, will make my family but more illustrious.

MARCHIONESS.

What are you talking about?

SCENE VIII.

THE COUNT, MARCHIONESS, NANINE.

PHILIP HOMBERT.

COUNT.

[To his mother.

Look at her, and gues.

MAR-

MARCHIONESS. [To Nanine.

My dearest child, come to my arms: but she is
strangely clothed, and yet how handsome she looks,
and modest too!

NANINE.

[Pay her respects to the Marchioness, and then run to her father.

O nature demands my first acknowledgments, my
dear father!

PHILIP HOMBERT.

O heaven! my daughter! O sir, you have made
me amends for forty years afflictions.

COUNT.

Ay, but how must I repair the injury I have done to
such exalted virtue! to come back in this dress, how
mean it is, but she adorns it; Nanine does honour to
every thing: speak, my Nanine, can your goodness
pardon the affront?

NANINE.

Can you, sir, doubt my forgiveness of it? I never
thought, after all your bounty to me, you cou'd injure me.

COUNT.

If you have indeed forgot the wrong I did you, give
me a proof of it: once more, and only once, I take
upon me to command you; but this once you must
swear --- to obey me.

PHILIP

PHILIP HOMBERT.

I am sure she owes it to you, and her gratitude —

NANINE. [To her father.

He need not doubt, sir, of my obedience.

COUNT.

I shall depend upon it: let me tell you then, that all your duty is not yet paid: I have seen you on your knees to my mother, and to your own father; one thing still remains for you, and that is, now, before them, to embrace—your husband.

NANINE.

Who? I?

MARCHIONESS.

Are you in earnest? can it be?

PHILIP HOMBERT.

O my child!

COUNT. [To his mother.

By your permission, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

My dear child, the family will be in a strange uproar about it.

COUNT.

O when they see Nanine, they must approve.

PHILIP

PHILIP HOMBERT.

What a stroke of fortune! O, sir, I never thought
you cou'd descend thus low.

C O U N T.

You promis'd to obey, and I must have it so.

M A R C H I O N E S S.

My son.

C O U N T.

My happiness, madam, depends on this important
moment: interest alone, we know, has made a thou-
sand marriages; we have seen the wisest men consult
fortune and character only: her character is irreproach-
able; and as to fortune, she wants it not: justice and
inclination shall do what avarice has so often done be-
fore: let me, then, madam, have your consent, and
finish all.

N A N I N E.

No, madam, you must not consent; indeed you
must not; oppose his passion, oppose mine: let me
intreat you, do: love has blinded him, do you, madam,
remove the veil: let me live far from him, and at a
distance only adore his virtues: you know my con-
dition; you see my father: can I, ought I, ever to
wish to call you mother?

MARCHIONESS.

Yes; you can, you ought: it is enough: I can hold out no longer: this last generosity has entirely subdued me: it tells me how much I ought to love: it is as singular, as extraordinary, as Nanine herself.

NANINE.

Then, madam, I obey; my heart can no longer resist the power of love.

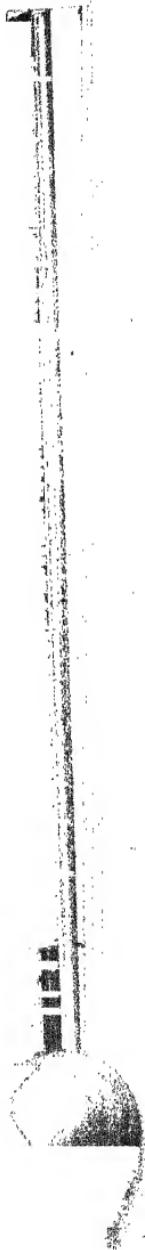
MARCHIONESS.

Let this happy day be the worthy recompense of virtue, *but let it not be made a precedent.

END of the THIRD and last ACT.

que ce jour
Soit des vertus la digne recompense
Mais sans tirer jamais à consequence.

The last line is intirely superfluous, and seems indeed to overthrow the tendency of the whole piece, which wou'd certainly have ended better with the first; but the author wanted a verse to answer the other, and was resolv'd to throw it in, however absurdly.





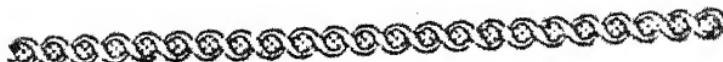
THE +

B A B B L E R.

A

C O M E D Y.

Represented in August, 1756.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

EUPHEMIA.

DAMIS.

HORTENSIA.

TRASIMON.

CLITANDER.

NERINE.

PASQUIN.

Several Footmen belonging to Damis.

THE
 *B A B B L E R.
 A
 C O M E D Y.

ACT I. SCENE I.

EUPHEMIA, DIMAS.

EUPHEMIA.

DON'T imagine, my dear, that, by what I'm going to say, I mean to exercise the authority of a mother, always ready as you know I am, to listen in my turn to your reasons when I think them good;

* This comedy is called in the original *L'INDISCRET*, literally translated, *THE INDISCREET*, but our language does not admit of the adjective without the substantive; and the *Indiscreet Man* wou'd sound almost as bad: I have therefore taken the liberty to substitute another title, which perhaps may convey a more complete idea of the principal character, than the vague term of an *indiscreet man*, which may be applied to follies of a different kind from that which the author meant to ridicule in the following piece.

my intention is not to lay my commands on you, but to give you my advice; it is my heart which speaks to you, and that experience I have had in the world makes me foresee evils which I wou'd endeavour to prevent: you have been at court, I think, not above two months; believe me, 'tis a dangerous situation: the perfidious group of courtiers always look upon a new comer with an eye of malevolence, and soon find out all his imperfections: from the first moment, they condemn him, without pity or remorse; and, which is still worse, their judgment is irrevocable: be guarded against their malice: on the first step we take in life, the rest of it must in a great measure depend: if you once make yourself ridiculous, the world will think you always so: the impression will remain: it is in vain, as you advance in years, to change your conduct, and assume a more serious behaviour: you will suffer a long time from old prejudices: even if we do grow better, we are still suspected; and I have often known men pay dearly in their old age for the errors of their youth: have a little regard therefore to the world, and remember you ought to live now more for that than for yourself.

DAMIS.

Now cannot I possibly conceive what all this long preamble tends to.

EUPHEMIA.

I see it appears to you both absurd and unnecessary: you despise those things which may be of the greatest consequence to you; one day or other perhaps you may believe me, when it will be too late: to be plain with you, you are ill-fav'd: my too long indulgence pass'd over this fault in your infancy, in your riper years I dread the effects of it: you are not without abilities, a good understanding, and a good heart; but, believ'e me, in a world so full of injustice, virtue will not make amends for vice; our faults are censur'd on every occasion, and perhaps the worst we can be guilty of is indiscretion: at court, my dear, the most necessary art is not to talk well, but to know how to hold one's tongue: this is not the place where society enjoys itself in the freedom of easy conversation; here they generally talk without saying any thing, and the most tiresome babblers have the best success: I have been long acquainted with the court, and bad enough it is: but whilst we live there, we ought to conform to it. With regard to the women, you shou'd be remarkably cautious; talk but seldom

of

of them, and still less of yourself; pretend to be ignorant of all they do, and all they say; conceal your opinion, and disguise your sentiments; but, above all, be master of your secrets: he who tells those of another will always be esteem'd a villain; and he who tells his own, be assur'd, will, here at least, be look'd on as a fool. What have you to object to this?

DAMIS.

Nothing: I am intirely of your opinion: I abominate the character of a tattler: that is not my foible, I assure you: so far from being guilty of the vice you seem to reproach me with, I now fairly confess to you, madam, that I have a long time conceal'd a thing from you which I ought to have told you of; but in life, you know, one must sometimes dissemble. I love, and am belov'd, by a most charming widow, young, rich, and handsome, as prudent as she is amiable; in a word, it is Hortensia: judge, madam, yourself of my happiness; judge, if it were known, how miserable it wou'd make all our courtiers, who are fighing for her: we have conceal'd our mutual passion from every one of them: this engagement has been made now for these two whole days past, and you knew nothing of it.

EUPHEMIA.

But I have been at Paris all that time.

DAMIS.

O, madam, never was man so happy in his choice: the more you approve of it, the more satisfaction shall I feel, and the more pleasure in my pursuit of her.

EUPHEMIA.

I am sure, Damis, the confidence you repose in me, is a mark of your friendship, and not of your imprudence.

DAMIS.

I hope you never doubted that.

EUPHEMIA.

But seriously, Damis, you shou'd reflect on the prospect of happiness before you: Hortensia, I know, has charms, but, besides that, she is the best match that cou'd have offer'd itself in all France.

DAMIS.

I know she is.

EUPHEMIA.

She is intirely her own mistress, and can choose for herself.

DAMIS.

So much the better.

EUPHEMIA.

You must take care how you manage her, mark her inclinations, and flatter them.

DAMIS.

O, I can do better: I know how to please her.

EUPHEMIA.

Well said, Damis: but remember, she's not fond of noise and bustle; no blustering or flashy airs will be agreeable to her: she may, like other women, have her foibles, but even in love-matters she'll always act with discretion: above all, let me advise you, not to shew off in public with her, nor appear at court together, as if on purpose to be stared at, and become the topic of the day: secret and mystery is all her taste.

DAMIS.

And yet the affair must be known at last.

EUPHEMIA.

But, pray, what lucky accident introduc'd you to her? she never admits young men to her toilette; but, like a prudent woman, carefully avoids the crowd of wild sparks that are perpetually after her.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

To tell you the truth, I have never been at her house yet: but I have ogled her a long time, and, thank heaven, with success: at first she sent back my letters unopen'd, but soon after read them, and now writes to me again: for near two days past I have had strong hopes, and, in a word, intend this very night to have a *tête à tête* with her.

EUPHENTIA.

Well: I think I'll go and see her too: the mother of a lover who is well-receiv'd, cannot, I imagine, but be agreeable to her. I may contrive to speak of you, and prevail on her to hasten the match, on which I shall tell her your happiness depends: get her consent, and make her your's as soon as you can; I'll do my best to assist you: but speak of it to nobody else, I charge you.

DAMIS.

No, madam: never was mother more tender and affectionate, or friendship more sincere; and to please her shall, for the future, be my first ambition.

EUPHEMIA.

All that I desire of you is, to be happy.

SCENE II.

DAMIS alone.

My mother's right: address and cunning are absolutely necessary in this world; there is no succeeding without them. I am resolv'd to dissemble with the whole court, except ten or a dozen friends, whom I may talk freely with: but first, by way of trial of my prudence, let me tell my secrets to myself a little, and consider, now nobody's by, what fortune has bestow'd upon me. I hate vanity, but there's no harm in knowing one's self, and doing ourselves justice: I have some wit, am agreeable, well receiv'd at court, and thought, I believe, by some, to be admitted to the king's private hours: then, I am certainly very handsome, can dance, sing, drink, and dissemble with the best of 'em: made a colonel at thirteen, I have reason to hope for a staff at thirty; happy in what I have, and with a good prospect before me; I'll keep Julia, and marry Hortensia; when I have possess'd her charms, I'll be guilty every day of a thousand infidelities, but all with prudence and oeconomy, and without ever being suspected as a rambler: in six months time I shall make away with half her fortune, and

enjoy

enjoy all the court by turns, without her knowing any thing of the matter.

SCENE III.

DAMIS, TRASIMON.

DAMIS.

Good morrow, governor.

TRASIMON.

[Aside.]

Hang him for coming across me.

DAMIS.

My dear governor, let me embrace thee.

TRASIMON.

Excuse me, sir, but I really —

DAMIS.

Positively I will: come, come —

TRASIMON.

Well, what, what do you want?

DAMIS.

Nay, don't frown so, man, pry'thee unbend a little: I am the happiest of mortals.

TRASIMON.

I came to tell you, sir —

DAMIS.

O, by heavens, you kill me with that hard frozen face of yours.

TRASIMON.

I can't help it, sir, nor can I smile at present, for, let me tell you, you have got a bad affair upon your hands.

DAMIS.

Not so very bad, sure.

TRASIMON.

Erminia and Valere exclaim violently against you: you have spoke of them, it seems, too lightly, and old lord Horace too desir'd me to tell you —

DAMIS.

O, a mighty matter indeed to be uneasy about! Horace an old lord? an old fool, a proud coxcomb, puffed up with notions of false honour, low enough at court, he puts on an air of importance in the city, and is as ignorant as he wou'd fain seem knowing: as for madam Erminia, it's pretty well known I had her, and left her abruptly, an ill natur'd busy-body; I believe you know a little of her lover, my friend, Valere; did you ever remember such a starch'd, affected, strain'd, left-handed understanding? O, by

the

the by, I was told yesterday in confidence, that his huge elder brother, that important creature, is well-receiv'd by Clarice, and the fat countess is bursting with spleen and disappointment. Well but, my old commandant, how go your love affairs?

TRASIMON.

You know I don't trouble myself much about the sex.

DAMIS.

That's not my case; for I do, and i'faith, both in court and city, they keep me pretty well employ'd: but listen, whilst I intrust you with a secret, on which the happiness of my life depends.

TRASIMON.

Can I serve you in it?

DAMIS.

No: not in the least.

TRASIMON.

Then pray tell me nothing about it.

DAMIS.

O but the rights of friendship—

TRASIMON.

'Tis that very friendship which makes me shrink from the weight of a secret which is entrusted to me,

not out of real regard, but from mere folly and weakness, which any body else might keep as well as myself; which is generally attended with a thousand suspicions, and may chance to give us both a great deal of uneasiness, me for knowing, and you for saying more than we ought.

DAMIS.

Say what you will about it, captain, I must let you have the pleasure of reading this billet-doux, which this very day——

TRASIMON.

What a strange humour——

DAMIS.

You'll say it's written with a great deal of tenderness.

TRASIMON.

Well, if you insist upon it——

DAMIS.

'Tis dictated by love itself: you'll see how fond she is of me: 'tis the hand that wrote it which makes it so valuable: but you shall see it: zounds, I've lost it; positively I can't find it—hola, la Fleur, la Brie.

SCENE IV.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, Several Footmen.

FOOTMAN.

Did you call, sir?

DAMIS.

Step immediately into the gallery, and bring me all the letters I receiv'd this morning: go to the old duke, and—O here it is, the blundering rascals had put it there by mistake. [To the footmen] you may go. Now, you shall see it; mind now, I beg you'll attend.

SCENE V.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER, with a letter in his hand, speaking to Pasquin.

Stay you, Pasquin, in this garden all day; be sure you mark every thing that passes; observe Hortensia well; and bring me an account of every step she takes: I shall know then.—

SCENE VI.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER.

DAMIS.

O here comes the marquis: good Morrow, marquis.

CLITANDER. [A letter in his hand.
Morrow to you.

DAMIS.

Why, what's the matter with you to-day, with that long melancholy face? what the deuce ails you all? every creature I see looks gloomy and dismal to-day, I think; but I suppose——

CLITANDER. [Aside.

I have but too much reason.

DAMIS.

What are you muttering about?

CLITANDER. [In a low voice.
What a poor unhappy creature I am!

DAMIS.

Come, to give you both a little spirit, suppose I read you this little billet of mine, ha, marquis?

CLITANDER. [Aside, looking at
the letter.

What letter? can it be? surely 'tis from Hortensia: cruel creature!

DAMIS. [To Clitander.

'Tis a letter wou'd make a rival hang himself.

CLITANDER.

You are indeed a happy man, if you are belov'd.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

That I most assuredly am; but you shall hear; your city ladies don't write in this style: observe her. [He reads] "At length I yield to the passion which has taken possession of my heart; I wou'd have conceal'd it, but 'tis impossible: why shou'd I not write what my eyes, no doubt, have a thousand times informed you of? yes, my dearest Damis, I own I love you; the more perhaps because my heart, fearful of your youth, and fearful of itself, for a long time resisted my inclination, and told me I ought not to love you. After the confession of such a weakness, ought I not for ever to reproach myself for it? but the more frankly I avow my tenderness for you, with the more care you ought to conceal it."

TRASIMON.

You take care, I see, to obey the lady's commands most punctually: a mighty discreet lover, to be sure!

CLITANDER.

Happy is that man who receives such letters, and never shews them.

DAMIS.

Well, what do you think of it? is not it——

TRASIMON.

Very strong indeed.

CLITANDER.

Charming.

DAMIS.

And the writer a thousand times more so. O if you did but know her name ! but in this wicked world we must have a little discretion.

TRASIMON

Well, we don't desire you to tell us.

CLITANDER.

You and I Damis love one another very well, but
prudence ——

TRASIMON.

So far from desiring you to acquaint us with particulars, that ——

DAMIS.

Come, come, I love you both too well to dissemble with you : I know, you think, and the whole court has proclaim'd it, that I have no affair here with any body but Julia.

CLITANDER.

Nay, they have it from yourself ; but as to us, we don't believe a word of it.

DAMIS.

To be sure, there was something between us, and the affair went on tolerably well till now: we lov'd one another, and then we parted, and then we met again; all the world knows that.

CLITANDER.

The world, I assure you, knows nothing at all about it.

DAMIS.

You think I'm very fond of her still, but you're mistaken; upon honour I am not.

TRASIMON.

'Tis nothing to me, whether you are or are not.

DAMIS.

Julia is handsome, that she is; but then she's fickle: the other, O the other is the very thing.

CLITANDER.

Well, and this charming woman——

DAMIS.

Come, I see you will know, and I must tell you: my dear friend, look at this picture, only look at it: did you ever see two such eyes? the most charming, most adorable creature; painted by Mace; that you

know

know is saying every thing ; you know the features, dont you ?

CLITANDER..

O heay'n ! 'tis Hortensia.

DAMIS.

You seem surpriz'd.

TRASIMON.

You forget, sir, that Hortensia is my cousin, that she is tender of her honour, and a declaration of this kind——

DAMIS.

O give her up, give her up, man ; why, I have six cousins ; you shall have 'em all : make up to 'em, ogle 'em, deceive 'em, desert 'em, print their love-letters, with all my heart, it will give me no uneasiness : we shou'd have enough to do indeed to be out of humour with one another, to vindicate the honour of our cousins : it's very well here, if every one can answser for themselves.

TRASIMON.

But Hortensia, sir ——

DAMIS.

Is the woman I adore ; and I tell you again, sir, she loves me, and me only ; and to make you more angry, I intend to marry her.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.]

Cou'd I have been more cruelly injur'd?

DAMIS.

Our wedding will be no secret, but you shan't be there—cousin.

TRASIMON.

A cousin, sir, may have some power over her, and that you shall know soon. Your servant, sir.

SCENE VII.

DAMIS, CLITANDER.

DAMIS.

How I detest that fellow! the ridiculous pedant, with his affected airs of romantic virtue; a tedious, heavy, tiresome brute! you seem to be mighty curious about that picture, and examine it closely.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.]

I must be master of myself, and dissemble.

DAMIS.

You may observe perhaps, one of the brilliants is missing at the corner there: I was a long chace yesterday, and there was such jostling and pushing one another; you must know I had four pictures loose in my pocket, and this unfortunately met with a mischance;

the

the case broke, and a brilliant dropp'd out: as you go to town to-morrow, you may call at Frénaye's, he's dear, but clever in his way: I wish you'd chuse a diamond at his shop, as if it was for yourself; for, between you and me, I owe him a few pounds: here, take the picture, but don't shew it to any body.. Your servant.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.]

Where am I?

DAMIS.

Well, God be wi'you, Marquis, I shall depend upon you. Take care, be discreet now.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.]

Can he possibly do it?

DAMIS.

[Returning.]

I love a discreet friend: you shall be my confidant: I'll tell you all my secrets. Is it possible for a man to be happy, to possess every thing his heart can wish for, and not tell it to another? where's the joy of keeping our insipid pleasures to ourselves? one may as well have no friends as not trust 'em, and happiness uncommunicated is no happiness at all: I have shewn you a letter, and a picture, but that's not all.

CLITANDER.

Why, what else have you?

DAMIS.

Do you know that this very night I am to meet her.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.]

O dreadful! horrible!

DAMIS.

To night, Clitander, before the ball is over, alone and unsuspected, I am to meet her by appointment in this garden.

CLITANDER.

[Aside.]

O I am lost, undone: this last cruel stroke --

DAMIS.

Is not that charming, my friend? dost not rejoice with me, boy?

CLITANDER.

And will Hortensia meet you?

DAMIS.

Most certainly; just at dusk I expect her; but the declining sun already gives me notice of my approaching happiness: I must be gone. I'll go to your lodgings, I think, and dress: let me see, I must have two pounds of powder for my hair, and some of the most exquisite perfume; then will I return in triumph, and finish the

affair.

affair immediately. Do you, in the mean time, prowl about here, that you may have some share in the happiness of your friend; I shall leave you here as my deputy, to keep off impudent rivals.

S C E N E VIII.

CLITANDER.

Alone.

How hard a task it was to conceal my grief and my resentment! after a whole year of sincerest passion, when Hortensia's heart, weary'd of resistance, began at length to soften and relent, for Damis thus to come and change her in an instant! one fortunate moment has done what my long and faithful services in vain solicited: nay, she even prevented his wishes, gave this young coxcomb that picture which I had so much better deserv'd: she writes to him too! O that letter wou'd have kill'd me with extacy: and then, to make my misery compleat, she has writ to me this morning, never to see her more: this hair-brain'd fellow has got hold of her heart, and will carry her off in triumph: O Hortensia, how cruelly hast thou deceiv'd me!

S C E N E

SCENE IX.

CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER.

So, Pasquin, I have found out my rival.

PASQUIN.

Indeed, sir? so much the worse.

CLITADNER.

Yes: she's in love with that blockhead, Damis.

PASQUIN.

Who told you so?

CLITANDER.

Himself: the proud coxcomb boasted to me of the treasure he had stolen from me. Here, Pasquin, look at this picture; out of mere vanity he has left it in my hands, only that he may triumph the more. O Hortensia, who cou'd ever have believ'd that Damis would supplant Clitander!

PASQUIN.

Damis is a good pretty fellow.

CLITANDER. [Collaring him.

Ha! rascal, an impertinent young fool, that—

PASQUIN.

Very true, sir, and perhaps — but, for heaven's sake, don't strangle me, sir: between you and I, sir, he's nothing but a babbler, a prig.—

CLITANDER.

Be he what he will, she prefers him to me, Pasquin; therefore now is the time to exert thy usual skill, and serve me: Hortensia and my rival are to meet this night in the garden, by appointment; find out some method, if possible, to prevent it.

PASQUIN.

But, sir.—

CLITANDER.

Thy brain, I know, is fertile; take money as much as thou wilt: for heaven's sake disappoint my rival: whilst he is tricking out his insignificant person, we may rob him of the happy moment: since he is a fool, let us take the advantage of his folly, and by some means or other keep him away from this place.

PASQUIN.

And this you think mighty easy to be done: why, sir, I wou'd sooner engage to stop the course of a river, a stag upon a heath, or a bird in the air, a mad poet repeating his own verses, a litigious woman that has a suit in chancery, a parson hunting after a benefice, a

high-wind, a tempest, or thunder and lightning, than a young coxcomb going to a rendezvous with his mistress.

CLITANDER.

And will you then abandon me to despair?

PASQUIN.

Stay: a thought is just come into my head: let me see, Hortensia and Damis have never seen me?

CLITANDER.

Never.

PASQUIN.

You have got her picture?

CLITANDER.

I have.

PASQUIN.

Good: and you have got a letter that she wrote you.

CLITANDER.

Ay, and a cruel one it is.

PASQUIN.

Her ladyship's orders I think to you, never to visit her again.

CLITANDER.

It is so.

PASQUIN.

The letter is without a direction I think?

CLITANDER.

It is, rascal, and what of that?

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Give me the picture and the letter immediately;
give them me, I say.

CLITANDER.

Shall I give a picture into other hands that was entrusted to my care?

PASQUIN.

Come, come, no ceremony: a pretty scruple indeed? give 'em me.

CLITANDER.

Well, but, Pasquin —

PASQUIN.

Leave every thing to me, and rely on my discretion.

CLITANDER.

You want to —

PASQUIN.

Away, away: here comes Hortensia.

SCENE X.

HORTENSIA, NERINE.

HORTENSIA.

What you say, Nerine, is very true, Clitander is worthy man; I know the warmth of his passion for me, and the sincerity of it: he is sober, sensible, constant, and discreet: I ought to esteem him, and so

do ; but Damis is my taste : I find, by the struggles of my own heart, that love is not always the reward of virtue ; we are always won by an agreeable outside ; and for one who is captivated by the perfections of the soul, a thousand are caught by the eye ; I blush at my own inconstancy : but Damis comes no more here, I assure you.

NERINE.

What a strange humour this is ! how resolute you are !

HORTENSIA.

No : I ought not to be there first, and positively I will not.

NERINE.

Are you afraid of the first meeting ?

HORTENSIA.

To tell you the truth, Damis takes up all my thoughts : this very day I have had a visit from his mother, who has greatly increas'd my prejudices in favour of her son : I see she is extremely eager for the match, and presses it in the warmest manner : but I want to see the man himself in private, and found his real sentiments.

NERINE.

You have no doubt of his regard for you ?

HOR-

HORTENSIA.

None: I believe, nay I know he loves me; but I want to hear him tell me so a thousand and a thousand times over: I want to see if he deserves my love, to know his temper, his character, and his heart: I wou'd not yield blindly to inclination, but judge of him, if I cou'd, without passion or prejudice.

SCENE XI.

HORTENSIA, NERINE, PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Madam, my master Damis has sent me here to acquaint you privately—

HORTENSIA.

Is not he coming himself?

PASQUIN.

No, madam.

NERINE.

The little villain!

HORTENSIA.

Not come to me?

PASQUIN.

No, madam: but, as in point of honour he thinks himself oblig'd, he has sent you back this portrait.

HORTENSIA.

My picture!

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Please to take it, madam.

HORTENSIA.

Am I awake?

PASQUIN.

Pray, ma'am, make haste, for I am really in a hurry: I have two more pictures to carry back for my master, and two to receive: and so, madam, till we meet again, I am your most obsequious ——

HORTENSIA.

Perfidious wretch! I shall die with grief.

PASQUIN.

He desir'd me moreover, madam, to inform you, that you need not ogle him any more, and that for the future he shou'd be glad if you wou'd find out some other dupe to laugh at besides himself.

SCENE XII.

HORTENSIA, NERINE, DAMIS, PASQUIN.

DAMIS. [At the further end of the stage.

Here I am to meet the dear object of my wishes.

PASQUIN.

Ha! Damis! then I am caught; but I'll take courage however, and proceed: [*he runs up to Damis and takes him aside.*] I belong, sir, to lady Hortensia,

and have the honour to be employed on her little affairs; I have, sir, here a billet-doux for you.

HORTENSIA.

What a change is here! what a reward for my tender passion!

DAMIS.

[Reads.]

Let me see, ha! how's this? "You deserve my regard, I know the esteem that is due to your virtues, but I cannot love you." Was ever such abominable perfidy? this is what I little expected indeed; but it shall be known; the public shall be acquainted with it: it shall be no secret at court, I can assure her.

HORTENSIA. [At the other part of the stage.]

Could he carry his infamous perfidy so far as this?

DAMIS.

There, madam, you see what value I set on your correspondence. [He tears the letter.]

PASQUIN. [Running up to Hortensia.]

O madam, I blush for his behaviour: you saw him tear the latter, which you condescended to write to the ungrateful man.

HORTENSIA.

He has sent back my picture: perish, thou wretched image of my ineffectual charms!

[She throws down the picture.]

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN. [Coming back to Damis.

* There, sir, you see how she treats you ; she has thrown away your picture, and broke it in pieces.

DAMIS.

There are some ladies in the world who receive the original in a very different manner, I can assure her.

HORTENSIA.

O, Nerine, what a regard I had for this ungrateful man ! Tell me, fellow, [Speaking to Pasquin, and giving him money.] for whose sake is it I am thus deserted ? to what happy object am I sacrifice'd ?

PASQUIN.

O, madam, to five or six beauties, whom he pretends to be in love with, though he cares as little for them as for yourself ; but your most dangerous rival is the fair Julia.

* Pasquin's scheme of deceiving them both by the letter and picture is well imagin'd : but the execution of it very awkwardly and ineffectually conducted : his running backwards and forwards from one to the other, the lover and his mistress being both on the stage together, whilst the deceit is carry'd on against them, together with the absurdity of leaving them together afterwards without coming to an reconciliation, are all circumstances to the last degree absurd and improbable. Voltaire's comedies, tho' they have some merit, are not excellent, and this is one of the poorest of them.

DAMIS. [Coming up to Pasquin.

Here, take this ring, and now, tell me honestly, on what impertinent court fool your sweet mistress has fix'd her affections.

PASQUIN.

No one, sir, deserves her so well as yourself; but, to tell you the truth, there is a certain young abbé who ogles her perpetually; not to mention that I frequently help her cousin Trafimon over the garden-wall of an evening.

DAMIS.

I'm glad on't: this is excellent news; I'll put it into a ballad.

HORTENSIA.

The worst of it is, Nerine, that to make me still more unhappy, this affair will make a noise in the world, and I shall be horribly expos'd: come, let us be gone, I will retire, and hide my tears.

PASQUIN. [To Hortensa.

You have no more commands for me, madam? [To Damis.] Can I be of any further service to you, sir? Heaven preserve you both!

A C T

SCENE XIII.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, NERINE.

HORTENSIA. [Returning,

Why do I stay in this place?

DAMIS.

I ought to be dancing at the ball now,

HORTENSIA.

He seems thoughtful, but 'tis not on my account.

DAMIS.

I am mistaken, or she looks this way; I'll e'en
make up to her.

HORTENSIA.

I'll avoid him.

DAMIS.

O, stay, Hortensia, can you fly me, can you avoid
me? cruel perfidious woman!

HORTENSIA.

Ungrateful man, leave me to myself, and let me try
to hate you.

DAMIS.

That, madam, will be an easy task, thanks to your
infidelity.

HORTENSIA.

"Tis what I ought to do: 'tis but my duty now,
thanks to your injustice.

DAMIS.

And are we met at last, Hortensia, but to quarrel?

HORTENSIA.

How can Damis talk thus, and at the same time
affront me, and love another! O, Julia, Julia!

DAMIS.

After your writing me such a letter, madam —

HORTENSIA.

After your sending back my picture, sir —

DAMIS.

Cou'd I send back your picture? cruel woman!

HORTENSIA.

Cou'd I ever write a line to you that was not full of
love and tenderness? perfidious man!

DAMIS.

Madam, I will consent to leave the court, to give
up the posts I enjoy, and all my hopes of future pre-
ferment, to be despis'd, and condemn'd by the whole
world, if ever I sent you back the picture, the pre-
cious treasure which love entrusted to my care.

HOR.

HORTENSIA.

And may I never be lov'd by the dear charmer of my soul, if I ever sent you that letter! but here, here, ungrateful man, is the picture your insolence return'd me, the reward of tender friendship, which you despis'd: 'tis here, and can you ——

DAMIS.

Ha! here comes Clitander.

SCENE XIV.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, CLITANDER, NERINE, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

My dear marquis, come here; where are you going? He, madam, will unravel all.

HORTENSIA.

Clitander? why, what does he know of the matter?

DAMIS.

Don't be alarm'd, madam, he is my friend, to whom I have open'd my whole heart: he is my confidant, let him be your's too: you must, indeed you must.

HORTENSIA.

Let us be gone this moment, Nerine: O, heav'n! what a ridiculous creature!

SCENE XV.

DAMIS, CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

O, marquis, I am the most unhappy of men; let me speak to you; I must follow her: observe me. [To Hortensia.] Stay, Hortensia; nay, then I must after her.

SCENE XVI.

CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER.

I don't know what to think of it, Pasquin; I understood, by what you told me, that they had quarrel'd.

PASQUIN.

I thought so too: I'm sure I play'd my part: most certainly they have cause to hate one another; but, for aught I know, a minute's time may reconcile them again.

CLITANDER.

Let us observe which way they turn.

PASQUIN.

Hortensia seems as if she was going to her own house.

CLI-

CLITANDER.

Damis follows her close: by his being behind, however, it looks as if she shun'd him.

PASQUIN.

She flies but slowly, and the lover pursues.

CLITANDER.

She turns her head back, and Damis talks to her, but to no purpose.

PASQUIN.

I fancy not, but Damis flops her often.

CLITANDER.

He kneels to her, but she treats him with contempt.

PASQUIN.

O, but observe, now she looks tenderly upon him: if so, you're undone.

CLITANDER.

She is gone into her own house, and has dismiss'd him: joy and fear, hope and despair, at once surround me; I can't imagine how it will end.

SCENE XVII.

CLITANDER, DAMIS, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

O, my dear marquis, I'm glad you're here; for heaven's sake, inform me, what can be the meaning that Hortensia forbids my coming nigh her? how happens it that the picture, which I trusted to you, is now in her hands? answer me.

[CLITANDER.

You amaze and confound me.

DAMIS.

[To Pasquin.

As for you, sir rascal there, the servant of Hortensia, at least the pretended one, I'll make an end of you this moment.

PASQUIN.

[To Clitander.

Protect me, sir.

CLITANDER.

[To Damis.

Well, sir —

DAMIS.

'Tis in vain —

CLITANDER.

Spare this poor fellow, let me intreat you, do.

DAMIS.

What interest have you in him?

CLI-

CLITANDER.

I beg it of you, and seriously.

DAMIS.

Out of regard to you, I will withhold my resentment; but tell me, scoundrel, the whole black contrivance.

PASQUIN.

O, sir, 'tis a most mysterious affair; but I'll let you into some surprizing secrets, if you'll promise not to reveal 'em.

DAMIS.

I'll promise nothing, and insist on knowing all.

PASQUIN.

You shall, sir, but Hortensia is coming this way, and will overhear us. [To Clitander.] Come, sir, let us to the masquerade, and there I'll tell you every thing.

SCENE XVIII.

TRASIMON, NERINE, HORTENSIA, in a domino, with a masque in her hand.

TRASIMON.

Take my word for it, Hortensia, this young coxcomb will cover us with shame and ignominy, to shew your letters and your picture about in this public manner:

ner: 'tis intolerable: I saw them myself; but I'll punish the scoundrel as he deserves.

HORTENSIA. [To Nerine.

Is Julia then so beautiful in his eyes? do you think he's really in love with her?

TRASIMON.

No matter whether he is or no: but, if he dishonours you, it concerns me nearly; I know a relation's duty, and will perform it.

HORTENSIA. [To Nerine.

Do you imagine he is engag'd to Julia? give me your opinion.

NERINE.

One may know that easily enough from himself.

HORTENSIA.

O, Nerine, he was excessively indiscreet; I ought to hate, yet perhaps still love him. O, how he wept, and swore he lov'd; that he ador'd me, and that he wou'd conceal our mutual passion!

TRASIMON.

There, I'm sure, he promis'd more than he will perform.

H O R-

HORTENSIA.

For the last time, however, I mean to try him : he's gone to the masquerade, there I shall be sure to find him : you must dissemble, Nerine : go and tell him that Julia expects him here with impatience : this masque at least will hide my blushes : the faithless man will take me for Julia : I shall know what he thinks of her, and of myself : on this meeting will depend my choice or my contempt of him. [To *Trafimor.*] You must not be far off : endeavour, if you can, to keep Clitander near you : wait for me here, or hereabouts, and I will call you when there is occasion.

SCENE XIX.

HORTENSIA alone, in a domino, with a masque in her hand.

At length it is time to fix my wavering affections ; under the cover of this masque, and the name of Julia, I shall know whether his indiscretion was owing to excess of love, or vanity ; whether I ought to pardon, or to detest him : but here he comes.

SCENE

SCENE XX.

HORTENSIA, masqued, DAMIS.

DAMIS. [Not seeing Hortensia.]

This seems to be the favourite spot for ladies to
make their ~~conversations~~ in: well, ~~allow~~ the ~~fa-~~

to reward that love which they inspir'd; thou art the woman upon earth whom I adore.

HOP-TENSIA.

tell you, I ... you are a stranger to my disposition. ... raise a heart that ... common ... like my lovers ... enabled ... young flirts ... n for me ... from ... tending ... e no ... d up ... Jess

SCENE XX.

HORTENSIA, masqued, DAMIS.

DAMIS. [Not seeing Hortensia.

This seems to be the favourite spot for ladies to make their assignations in: well, I'll follow the fashion: fashion, in France, determines every thing, regulates precedence, honour, good-breeding, merit, wit, and pleasure.

HORTENSIA.

[Aside.

The coxcomb!

DAMIS.

If this affair of mine cou'd but be known, in two year's time the whole court wou'd run mad for love of me: a good setting out here is every thing: then Ægle, and Doris, and—O there's no counting them, such a groupe, such a sweet prospect! O the pretty creatures—

HORTENSIA.

[Aside.

Light vain man!

DAMIS.

O Julia, is it you? I know you in spite of that envious mask: my heart cannot be mistaken; come, come, my dear Julia, take off that cruel veil that hides thy beaties from me; do not, in pity do not, conceal those sweet looks, those tender smiles, that were meant

to

to reward that love which they inspir'd; thou art the only woman upon earth whom I adore.

HORTENSIA.

Let me tell you, Damis, you are a stranger to my humour and disposition; I shou'd despise a heart that never felt for any woman but my self; I like my lovers shou'd be more fashionable; that twenty young flirts shou'd be hunting after him; that his passion for me shou'd draw him away from a hundred contending beauties; I must have some noble sacrifice offer'd up to me, or I'll never accept of his services: a lover less esteem'd wou'd be of no value, I shou'd despise him.

DAMIS.

I can make you easy on that head, my dear; I have made some pretty good conquests, and perhaps as expeditiously as most men: I believe I can boast of tolerable success that way: many a fine woman has run after me; another man wou'd be vain upon it: I cou'd reckon up a few of your nice ladies who are not over coy to me.

HORTENSIA.

Well, but who, who are they?

DAMIS.

Only give the word, my Julia, and I begin the sacrifice: there is, first, the little Isabel; seconly, the

lively

lively smart Erminia; then there's Clarice, Aëgle Doris — — —

HORTENSIA.

Poor pitiful offerings, I cou'd have a hundred such every day: these will never do: they are lov'd, and turn'd off again twenty times in a week: let me have some respectable names, women of character, such as I may triumph over without a blush: if you cou'd reckon amongst your captives, one, who, before she saw the incomparable Damis, was invulnerable, one who in all actions paid the strictest regard to decency and decorum, some modest prudent fair, who never felt weakness but for you, that wou'd be the woman.

DAMIS. [Sitting down by her.

Now then, observe me: I have a mistress who exactly resembles in every feature the picture you have drawn: but you wou'd not have me be so indiscreet as to — — —

HORTENSIA.

Not for the world,

DAMIS.

If I was imprudent enough to tell her name, I shou'd call her — — — Hortensia. Why do you startle at it? I think not of her whilst my Julia's here: she is neith

ther young nor handsome when you are by: besides, there is a certain young Abbé who is very familiar with her; and, between you and I, her cousin Traismon is too apt to come to her in an evening over the garden wall.

TENSIA.

[Aide.

Join on his infi
it I n
you w
does i

verable
pray,
n what

Im

I can
herself up

lively smart Erminia; then there's Clarice, Agle Doris ——.

HORTENSIA.

Poor pitiful offerings, I cou'd have a hundred such every day: these will never do: they are lov'd, and turn'd off again twenty times in a week: let me have some respectable names, women of character, such as I may triumph over without a blush: if you cou'd reckon amongst your captives, one, who, before she saw the incomparable Dainis, was invulnerable, one who in all actions paid the strictest regard to decency and decorum, some modest prudent fair, who never felt a weakness but for you, that wou'd be the woman.

DAMIS. [Sitting down by her.

Now then, observe me: I have a mistress who exactly resembles in every feature the picture you have drawn: but you wou'd not have me be so indiscreet as to ——

HORTENSIA.

Not for the world.

DAMIS.

If I was imprudent enough to tell her name, I shou'd call her —— Hortensia. Why do you startle at it? I think not of her whilst my Julia's here: she is neither

ther young nor handsome when you are by: besides, there is a certain young Abbé who is very familiar with her; and, between you and I, her cousin Trasimon is too apt to come to her in an evening over the garden wall.

HORTENSIA.

[Aside.]

To join calumny thus to his infidelity, execrable villain! but I must dissemble: pray, Damis, on what footing are you with Hortensia? does she love you?

DAMIS.

O to distraction, that's the truth of it.

HORTENSIA.

[Aside.]

Impudence and falsehood to the highest degree!

DAMIS.

'Tis even so, I assure you, I wou'd not tell you a lie for the world.

HOETENSIA.

[Aside.]

The villain!

DAMIS.

But what signifies thinking about her? we did not meet here to talk of Hortensia: come, let us rather——

HORTENSIA.

I can never believe Hortensia wou'd ever have given herself up so totally to you.

DAMIS,

DAMIS.

I tell you, I have it under her own hand.

HORTENSIA.

I don't believe a word of it.

DAMIS.

'Tis insulting me to doubt it.

HORTENSIA.

Let me see it then.

DAMIS.

You injure me, madam : there, read, perhaps you know her hand.

[Gives her the letter.

HORTENSIA. [Unmasking.

I do, villain, and know your treachery : at length I have in some measure atoned for my folly, and have luckily recover'd both the picture and the letter, which I had ventur'd to trust in such unworthy hands : 'tis done : now Trasimon, and Clitander, appear.

SCENE XXI.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER.

HORTENSIA. [To Clitander.

If I have not yet offended you beyond a possibility of pardon ; if you can still love Hortensia, my hand, my fortune, and my life are your's.

C L I-

CLITANDER.

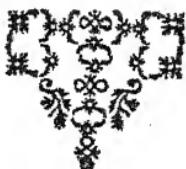
O Hortensia, behold at your feet a despairing lover,
who receives your kind offer with joy, and transport.

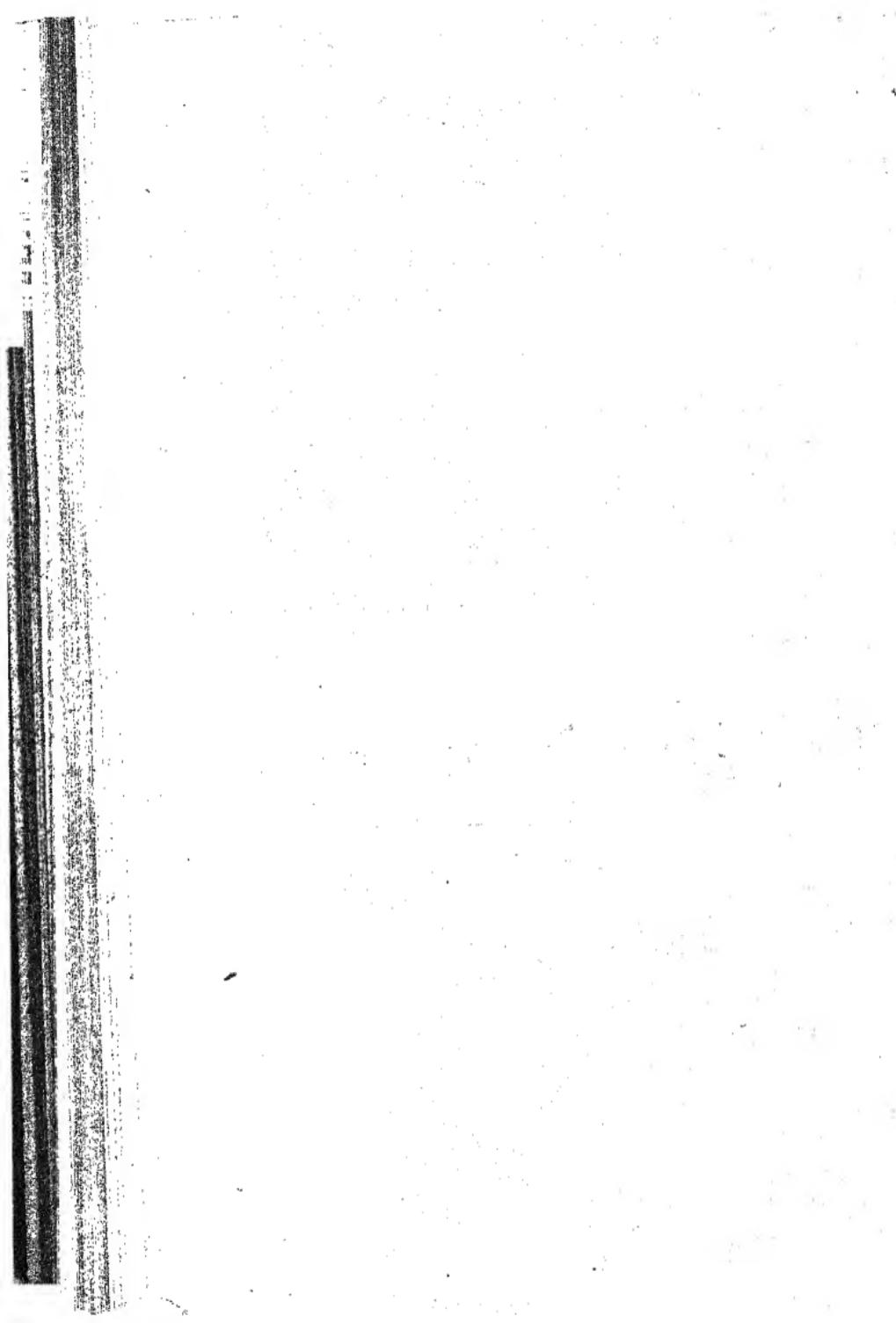
TRASIMON. [To Damis.

Did not I tell you, sir, I shou'd bring her to a right
way of thinking? this marriage, sir, is my making:
now, Damis, fare you well, and henceforth, learn to
dissemble better, or never attempt it more.

DAMIS.

Just heaven! for the future how shall I venture to
speak at all?





2

Z A R A.

A

TRAGEDY.

AN
 EPISTLE DEDICATORY
 TO
 Mr. FALKNER, an English Merchant,
 Since Ambassador at CONSTANTINOPLE,
 WITH
 The TRAGEDY of ZARA.

My dear friend,

YOU are an *Englishman*, and I a native of *France*; but all lovers of the fine arts are fellow-citizens: men of taste and virtue have pretty nearly the same principles in every country, and form one general common-weal: it is no longer therefore matter of astonishment to see a *French* tragedy dedicated to an *Englishman*, or an *Italian*, any more than it wou'd have been, in the days of antiquity, for a citizen of *Ephesus*, or of *Athens*, to address his performance to a *Grecian* of some other city: I lay this tragedy before you therefore as my countryman in literature, and my most intimate friend.

I shall,

I shall, at the same time, have the pleasure of informing my brother *Frenchmen* here in what light traders are look'd upon amongst you, what regard the *English* have for a profession so essential to the welfare of their kingdom, and the honour which they have to represent their country in parliament, in the rank of legislators : Though trade is despised by our *petits-maitres*, who, you know as well as myself, both in *England* and *France*, are the most contemptible species of being that crawl upon the face of the earth.

My further inducement to correspond with an *Englishman*, rather than any other man, on subjects of literature, arises from your happy freedom of thought, which never fails to inspire me with bolder ideas, and more nervous expressi n. * * 'Whoever converses with me has, for the time at least, my heart at his disposal ; if his sentiments are lively and animated, he inflames me : if he is strong and nervous, he raises and supports me : the courtier, who is all

* The passages which I have inclos'd between asterisks, and mark'd thus * * are, in the original, written in a familiar kind of verses, consisting of eight syllables, which *Mr. Voltaire* is, in most of his letters, fond of intermingling with his prose : the reader will easily perceive that, however agreeable those rhymes might be to a *French* ear, both the subject and style, in the greater part of them, are of such a nature, as not to admit of an *English* poetical translation.

disimulation, makes me insensibly as affected and constrain'd in my behaviour as himself; but a bold and fearless spirit gives me ferment and courage: I catch fire from him, just as young painters, brought up under *le Maine* or *Argilliere*, catch the freedom of their master's pencils, and compose with their spirit: thus *Virgil* admir'd *Homer*, follow'd his steps, and, without being a plagiary from him, became his rival.'

You need not be apprehensive of my sending you, with this piece, a long apology and vindication of it: I might indeed have told you, why I did not make *Zara* more determin'd to embrace christianity before she knew her father; why she keeps the secret from her lover, &c. but those who have any judgment, or any justice, will see my reasons without my pointing them out; and as for those criticks who are predetermin'd not to believe me, it wou'd be lost labour to give them any reasons at all.

All I can boast of is, that the piece is tolerably simple; a perfection, in my opinion, that is not to be despis'd.

‘ This happy simplicity was one of the distinguishing beauties of learned antiquity: 'tis pity you *Englishmen* don't introduce this novelty on your stage, which

is so fill'd with horror, gibbets, and murthers: put more truth into your dramatic performances, and more noble images: *Addison* has endeavour'd at it: he was the poet of the wise, but he was too stiff: and, in his boasted *Cato*, the two girls are really very insipid characters: imitate from the great *Addison* only what is good; polish a little the rude manners of your wild muse; write for all times, and all ages, for fame, and for posterity, and transfuse into your works the simplicity of your manners.'

But I wou'd not have your *English* poets imagine, that I mean to give them *Zara* as a model: I preach simplicity to them, and easy numbers, but I wou'd not be thought to set up for the faint of my own sermon: if *Zara* has met with success, I owe it not so much to the merit of the performance, as to the tenderness of the love scenes, which I was wise enough to execute as well as I possibly cou'd: in this I flatter'd the taste of my audience; and he is generally sure to succeed, who talks more to the passions of men than to their reason: if we are ever so good christians, we must have a little love besides: and I am satisfy'd the great *Corneille* was much in the right of it, not to confine himself, in his *Polygate*, merely to the breaking of the statues of Jupiter.

piter by the new converts : for such is the depravity of human kind, that perhaps

* The pious soul of *Polyeucte* wou'd have but little impression on the audience, and even the christian verses he declaims wou'd have been receiv'd with contempt, if it had not been for his wife's passion for her favourite heathen, who was certainly more worthy of her love than the good devotee her husband.

Almost the same accident happen'd to *Zara*: all my friends, who frequent the theatre, asfir'd me, that if she had been only converted, she wou'd not have been half so interesting : but she was in love with the most perfect religion in the world, and that has made her fortune : I cou'd not however expect to escape censure

* Many an inexorable critick has carp'd at and flasht me, and many a remorseless jester has pretended that I only filch'd an improbable Romance, which I ha' not the sense to improve ; that I have lamed an spoil'd the subject ; that the catastrophe is unnatural ; they even prognosticated the dreadful hiss with whic a disgusted public salutes a miserable poet : but I despis'd their censures, and risk'd my play upon the stage ; the public was more favourable than they expected, or I deserv'd ; instead of hisses, it was receiv'd with shouts : tears flow'd almost from every eye : b

I am not puff'd up with my success, I assure you I am no stranger to all its faults. I know very well it is absolutely indisputable, that before we can make a perfect work, we must sell ourselves to the devil, which was what I did not chuse to do.

I do not flatter myself that the *English* will do *Zara* the same honour they have done to *Brutus*, a* translation of which has been play'd at *London*: they tell us ere, that you have neither devotion enough to be affected by old *Lusignan*, nor tenderness to feel for *Zara*: you love a conspiracy better than an intrigue: upon our stage, they say the word, country, is sure of getting a clap, and so is, love, upon ours; but to say the truth, you have as much love in your tragedies as we have: if you have not the reputation of being tender, it is not that your stage heroes are not in love, but that they seldom express their passion naturally: our lovers talk like lovers; yours like poets.

But if the *French* are your superiors in gallantry, there are many things which, in return, we may borrow of you: to the *English* theatre I am indebted for the liberty which I have taken of bringing the names of our kings and antient families upon the stage: a

Mr. *Voltaire* was mistaken in this particular, as no translation of his *Brutus* was ever exhibited on the *English* stage.

novelty of this kind may perhaps be the means of introducing amongst us a species of tragedy hitherto unknown, and which we seem to want. Some happy geniusses will, I make no doubt, rise up, who will bring to perfection that idea, of which *Zara* is but a slight sketch: as long as literature meets with protection in *France*, we shall always have writers enough. Nature every day forms men of talents and abilities: we have nothing to do but to encourage and employ them: but if those which distinguish themselves are not supported by some honourable recompence, and by the still more pleasing charm of admiration, all the fine arts must soon perish, even though so many edifice have been rais'd to shelter and protect them: the noble plantation of *Louis XIV.* wou'd die away for want of culture: the public might still have taste, but there wou'd be no eminent masters: the sculptor in his academy wou'd see a number of indifferent pupils about him, but never have the ambition to imitate *Girardon* and *Pujet*: the painter wou'd rest satisfy'd with excelling his cotemporaries, but wou'd never think of rivalling *Poussin*: may the successors of *Lewis XIV.* always follow the example of that great monarch, who inspired every artist with emulation! encourag'd at the same time a *Racine* and a *Van-Robais*: he carry'd our con-

uance and our glory to the furthest part of the globe, and extended his bounty to foreigners of all nations, who were astonish'd at the fame and rewards which our court bestow'd upon them : wherever merit appear'd, it found a patron in *Louis XIV.*

Where'er that bounteous star its influence shed,
Fair merit rais'd her long-declining head ;
His royal hand spread honours, wealth, and fame,
Then *Viviani*, then *Cassini* came :
Newton refus'd a gift from *France*'s throne,
Or *Newton* too, thou know'st, had been our own :
These are the deeds that raise our *Gallia*'s fame,
These, *Louis*, will immortalise thy name,
And truly make thee, what thou wert design'd,
The universal monarch of mankind.

ou have no foundations equal to the munificent donations of our kings ; but then your people supplies the want of them : you don't stand in need of royal favour to honour and reward superior talents of every kind. *Field* and *Vanbrugh* were comedy writers, and at the same time members of parliament : the primacy given to *Dr. Tillotson*, *Newton* honour'd with an important trust, *Prior* made an ambassador, and *Addison* a minister of state, are but the common and ordinary consequences of the regard which you pay to merit,

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and to great men: you heap riches on them whilst they live, and erects monuments and statues to them after their death: even your celebrated actresses have places in your churches, near the great poets.

* Your *Oldfield*, and her predecessor, *Bracegirdle*, in consideration of their having been so agreeable to the public when in their prime, their course finish'd, were, by the consent of your whole nation, honour'd with a pompous funeral, and their remains carry'd under a velvet pall, and lodg'd in your church with the greatest magnificence: their spirits, no doubt, are still proud of it, and boast of the honour in the shades below: whilst the divine *Moliere*, who was far more worthy of it, cou'd scarce obtain leave to sleep in a church-yard; and the amiable *Le Couvreur*, whose eyes I clos'd, cou'd not even so much as obtain two wax-tapers and a coffin; Mons. *de Laubiniere*, out of charity, carry'd away her corpse by night in a hackney-coach to the banks of the river: do you not even now see the god of love breaking his arrows in a rage, and *Melpomene* in tears, banishing herself from that ungrateful place which *le Couvreur* had so long adorn'd?"

But every thing, in these our days, conspires to reduce *France* to that state of barbarism from which *Louis XIV.* and cardinal *Richelieu* had deliver'd her: a curse on that policy which knows not the value of the fine arts ! the world is peopled with nations as powerful as our own; how happens it then that we look on them with so little esteem ? for the same reason perhaps that we despise the company of a rich man, whose mind is tasteless and uncultivated : do not imagine that this empire of wit, this glory of being the universal model for mankind, is a trifling distinction, it is the infallible mark of the grandeur of a kingdom : under the greatest princes the arts have always flourish'd, and their decay is often succeeded by that of the state itself: history will supply us with ample proofs of it ; but this wou'd lead me too far out of my subject: I shall finish this letter, which is already too long, with a little performance, which naturally demands a place at the head of this tragedy : an epistle, in verse, to the actress who play'd the part of *Zara*; I owe her at least this compliment for the manner in which she acquitted herself on that occasion.

* For the prophet of *Mecca* never had *Greek* or *Arabian* in his seraglio so beautiful or so genteel: her black eyes, so finely arch'd and full of tenderness,

ness, with her excellent voice, mien and carriage, defended my performance against every auditor that had a mind to be troublesome: but when the reader catches me in his closet, all my honour, I fear, will be lost.'

Adieu, my dear friend, continue to cultivate philosophy and the Belles-lettres, without forgetting to send your ships to the *Levant*.

I have the honour to remain, &c.

A

S E C O N D L E T T E R

TO

Mr. F A L K N E R,

Then Ambassador at CONSTANTINOPLE,

From the Second Edition of the Tragedy of ZARA.

My dear friend,

FOR your new dignity of ambassador only makes our friendship more respectable, and shall not prevent my making use of a title even more sacred than that of minister ; the name of *Friend* is much above that of, *your Excellency*. I now dedicate to the ambassador of a great king, and a free nation, what I had before address'd to a plain citizen, and an English merchant : those who know how much commerce is respected in your country, must know that a tradesman is there sometimes a legislator, a good officer, and a public minister.

Some ridiculous people, who had fall'n in with the fashion, of paying respect to nothing but nobility, thought proper to laugh at the novelty of a dedication

to a man who had nothing but merit to recommend him: who took the liberty, on a stage sacred to calumny and bad taste, to insult the author of that dedication, and to* reproach the gentleman to whom it was address'd for being a merchant: but we must not, sir, impute to our whole nation an affront so gross and illiberal, that people, ever so uncivilis'd, wou'd have been ashame'd to commit. The magistrates of our police, who are constantly employ'd in rectifying abuses of this kind, were, to the last degree, surpris'd at it: but the contempt and ignominy with which the public have branded the acknowledg'd author of this indignity, are, I hope, a fresh proof of *French* politeness: those virtues, which form the character of a whole people, are often contradicted, and, as it were, call'd in question by the vices of an individual: there were some voluptuaries, we know, even at *Lacedæmon*: there have been low and foolish fellows in England; men without taste, or good breeding, at *Athens*; and so there are in *Paris*.

* Mr. Falbœuf, and some other gentlemen of character, were affronted at the *Théâtre Italien* at Paris, by some injurious reflections thrown out upon them in a contemptible farce exhibited there, which was his'd by the audience.

You:

You will, I hope, forget them, sir, as they are forgotten by the world, and receive this second mark of my respects: they are due to you still more than they were before, as this tragedy has made its appearance at *London*. It has been translated, and acted with so much success, and the author of it spoken of with so much regard and politeness, that I ought to return my public thanks to the whole nation.

I do not know how to acquit my obligations to you by any other means, than acquainting my countrymen here with the particulars of the translation, and representation of *Zara* on the *English* stage.

Mr. *Hill*, a man of letters, and one who seems to understand the theatre better than any *English* author, did me the honour to translate this piece, with the design of introducing something new on your stage, both with regard to the manner of writing tragedies, and of repeating them. I shall speak, by and by, of the representation.

The art of declaiming was for a long time amongst you intirely out of nature; most of your tragic actors expressed themselves more like poets seized with rapturous enthusiasm, than like men inspired by a real passion. Several of your comedians were even more intolerable, they roared out their verses with

an impetuous fury, that was no more like the natural tone, than convulsions and distortions are to an easy and noble carriage. This air of riot and tumult seemed entirely foreign to your nation, which is naturally sober and grave, even to such a degree, as frequently to appear cold and unanimated in the eye of a stranger. Your preachers never indulge themselves in a declamatory tone, and you would laugh at a pleader at the bar, who should work himself up into a passion: the players were the only outrageous set of people in the kingdom. Our actors and actresses also, particularly the latter, were guilty of this for many years. *M. le Couvreur* was the first who broke them of it: thus an *Italian* writer, a man of great sense and parts, speaks of her:

La legiadra Couvreur sola non trotta
 Per quella strade dove i suoi compagni
 Van di galoppo tutti quanti in frotta,
 Se auvien ch'ella pianga, o che si lagni
 Senza quelli urli spaventosi loro
 Ti muove si che in pianger l'accompagni.

The same change which *le Couvreur* effected on our stage, Mrs. *Cibber* brought about on your's, in the part of *Zara*: how astonishing it is, that in every art it

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should be so long before we arrive at the simple and the natural !

A novelty that must appear still more extraordinary to a *Frenchman* is, that a gentleman of your country *, a man of rank and fortune, should condescend to play the part of *Osman*. It was an interesting circumstance to see the two principal characters represented, one by a person of condition, and the other by a young actress not above eighteen years of age, who had never repeated a line before in her life. This instance of a gentleman's exercising his talents for declamation, is not singular amongst you ; it is perhaps more surprising that we should wonder at it : we ought certainly to reflect, that every thing in this world depends upon custom and opinion : the court of *France* have danc'd on the stage with the actors of the opera, and we thought there was nothing strange in it, but that the fashion of this kind of entertainment should be discontinued. Why should it be more extraordinary for people to write than to dance in pub-

* This gentleman whom Mr. Voltaire calls *a man of rank and fortune, and a person of condition*, who was so condescending, was nothing more than a nephew of *Aaron Hill's*, who had more passion than genius for the stage, and play'd the part of *Osman* so execrably, that he was his'd off, and never, I believe, made his appearance there afterwards.

He? is there any difference between these two arts, except that the one is as much above the other, as the perfections of the mind are superior to those of the body; I have said it before, and I say so still, none of the polite arts are contemptible; and to be ashame'd of talents of any kind, is of all things the most shameful.

I come now to the translation of *Zara*, and the change which has been made amongst you with regard to the drama.

You had a strange custom, which even Mr. *Adelphi*, the chasteſt of your writers, adopted, so often does custom get the better of ſenſe and reaſon; I mean, the ridiculous custom of finishing every act by verſes in a diſſerent taſte from the reſt of the piece, which verſes uſually conſiſted of a ſimilee. *Phaedra*, as ſhe leaves the ſtage, compares herſelf to a bitch; *Cato* to a rock, and *Cleopatra* to children that cry themſelves aſleep. The tranſlator of *Zara* was the firſt who dared to maintain the rights of naſure againſt a cuſtom ſo diſtinctly oppoſite to her *. He proſcrib'd

* A perſon unacquainted with the *English* ſtage would natu‐rally imagine, from Mr. *Voltaire's* character of *Aaron Hill*, that he was one of the greaſteſt poeſts we ever had; and yet, in reality, nothing can be more labour'd, ſtiff, and obſcure, than his ſtyle and

proscrib'd this custom, well knowing that passion should always speak its own language, and that the poet should disappear, to make room for the hero.

Upon this principle he has translated plainly, and without any unnecessary ornaments, all the simple verses of the piece, which must have been entirely spoiled by an endeavour to render them beautiful, such as,

On ne peut desirer ce qu'on ne connoit pas.

J' eusse été pres du Gange esclave des faux dieux
Chretienne dans Paris, Musulmane en ces lieux.

Mais Orosmane m'aime, & j'ai tout oublié

Non, la reconnaissance est un foible retour
Un tribut offensant, trop peu fait pour l'amour.

Je me croirois hai d'etre aimé foiblement.

Je veux avev excés vous aimer & vous plaire

L'art ne'st pas fait pour toi, tu n'en a pas besoin.

L'art le plus innocent tient de la perfidie:

and expression in every one of his pieces, though he was not without taste, and sentiment. But if Mr. *Voltaire* had not been sway'd more by prejudice than judgment, he would not so rashly have condemn'd our theatre, nor placed *Addison* at the head of our dramatic writers.

All the verses that are in this fine taste of simplicity, are render'd word for word into *English*: they might very easily have been adorn'd, but the translator judg'd in a different manner from several of my countrymen; he liked the verses, and retained therefore all the simplicity of them; the stile indeed ought always to be agreeable to the subject; *Alzira*, *Brutus*, and *Zara*, for example, required three different kinds of versification: if *Berenice* complained of *Titus*, and *Ariadne* of *Theseus*, in the stile of *Cinna*, neither *Berenice* nor *Ariadne* would please or affect us; we can never talk well of love, if we search after any other ornaments but truth and simplicity.

This is not the place to examine whether it be right or wrong, to put so much love into our dramatic performances: I will even allow it to be a fault, but it is a fault which will always be universal; nor do I know what name to give that fault, which is the delight of all mankind: one thing I am satisfy'd of, that the *French* have succeeded better in it than all other nations; antient and modean, put together: love appears on our stage with more decorum, more delicacy, and truth, than we meet with on any other; and the reason is, because of all nations the *French* are best acquainted with society: the perpetual commerce

and

and intercourse of the two sexes, carry'd on with so much vivacity and good breeding, has introduc'd amongst us a politeness unknown to all the world but ourselves.

Society principally depends on the fair sex: all those nations who are so unhappy as to confine their women are unsociable: the austerity of your manners, your political quarrels, and religious wars, that render'd you savage and barbarous, depriv'd you, even down to the age of *Charles II.* of the pleasures of society, even in the bosom of liberty: the poets therefore, neither of your country, nor of any other, knew any thing of the manner in which love ought to be treated.

Good comedy was utterly unknown amongst us till the days of *Moliere*; as was the art of expressing our sentiments with delicacy till those of *Racine*, because society had not attain'd to any degree of perfection before that time: a poet cannot paint in his closet, manners which he has never seen; and wou'd sooner write a hundred odes and epistles than one scene where nature must speak: your *Dryden*, who was in other respects a great genius, put into the mouth of his heroes in love, either high-flown strains of rhetorical flourish, or something indecent, two things equally opposite to tenderness.

If Mr. Racine makes *Titus* say,

Depuis cinq ans entiers chaque jour je la voie
Et croi toujours la voir pour la première fois.

Your Dryden makes *Antony* say,

————— how I lov'd,

Witness ye days and nights, and all ye hours,
That danc'd away with down upon your feet,
As all your busines were to count my love,
One day past by, and nothing saw but love ;
Another came, and still 'twas only love :
The suns were weary'd out with looking on,
And I untir'd with loving—————

It is very difficult to conceive that *Antony* shou'd ever really talk thus to *Cleopatra*. In the same play, *Cleopatra* speaks thus to *Antony* :

Come to me, come my soldier, to my arms,
You've been too long away from my embraces ;
But when I have you fast, and all my own,
With broken murmurs, and with amorous sighs,
I'll say, you were unkind, and punish you,
And mark you red with many an eager kiss.

It is not improbable but that *Cleopatra* might frequently talk thus, but indecencies of this kind are not to be

represented before a respectable audience: some of your countrymen may perhaps say, this is pure nature; but we may tell them in answer, that if it be so, it is that nature which ought carefully to be conceal'd: it shews but little knowledge of human nature, to imagine that we can please the more by presenting these licentious images; on the contrary, it is shutting up the avenues to true pleasure: where every thing is at once discover'd, we are disgusted; there remains no more to look for or desire; and in our pursuit of pleasure we meet with languor and satiety: this is the reason why those, who are truly qualify'd for society, taste pleasures far more exquisite than grosser appetites can have any idea of: the spectators, in this case, are like lovers who are satiated by too quick possession: those ideas which, when brought too close, wou'd make us blush, shou'd be seen as it were thro' a cloud. It is this veil to which, to a right mind, they are indebted for all their charms: there is no pleasure without decorum *. The *French* are certainly better acquainted with this than any other nation upon earth;

* There is no expression in the *English* language which fully comprehends the meaning of the *French* word *Bienféeance*, which notwithstanding, unfortunately for a translator, being a favourite phrase, recurs in almost every page: as does also the word *Naivete*, for which we have no term in all respects correspondent to it.

not because they are *without genius and spirit*, as the unequal and imperious *Dryden* has ridiculously asserted; but because, ever since the regency of *Anne of Austria*, they have been the most sociable and the most polish'd people in the universe: and this politeness is not an arbitrary thing, like what they call civility, but a law of nature, which they have happily cultivated far beyond any other nation.

The translator of *Zara* has, almost throughout his whole piece, strictly observ'd those decencies of the stage which are common to us both; but there are, at the same time, some places where he has intirely adher'd to antient customs.

For instance, when in the *English* piece *Osmar* comes to tell *Zara* that he can no longer love her, she answers him by *rolling upon the ground*: the Sultan is not mov'd at seeing her in this ridiculous posture of despair, and yet the moment after is astonish'd at *Zara's* weeping, and cries out,

Zara, thou weep'it.

He shou'd have said to her before,

Zara, thou roll'ft upon the ground.

Insomuch that those three words, *Zara, thou weep'it*, which have so fine an effect on our stage, have none on ours, because they were displac'd: those familiar and

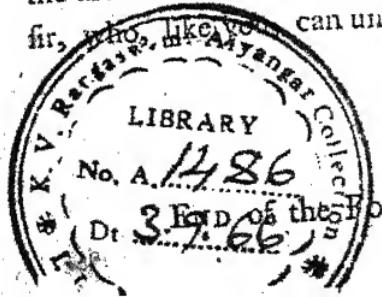
simple

simple expressions derive all their power from the manner in which they are introduc'd. *My lord, you change countenance,* is nothing of itself: but when these words are pronounc'd by *Mithridates*, we shudder at them.

To say nothing but what we ought to say, and that in the manner in which it ought to be said, is a point of perfection which the *French* have come nigher to than the writers, myself excepted, of other countries: on this subject we have, I think, a right to dictate to them: you can teach us perhaps greater and more useful things, we ought to acknowledge it. The *French*, who have wrote against sir *Isaac Newton's* discoveries, with regard to light and colours, are ashame'd of it; those who oppose his system of gravitation will soon be still more so.

You ought to submit to our rules of the stage, as we submit to your philosophy: we have made as good experiments on the human heart, as you have in physicks, the art of pleasing seems to be the art of *Frenchmen*, the art of thinking is all your own. Happy are those sir, who, like you, can unite them.

I am, SIR, &c.



FOURTH VOLUME.

